

THE OUR FATHER – Should we repeat prayers at Mass? The Our Father as a cheat code for Christian Meditation.

The Communion Rite is the name the Catholic Church has given to the last subsection of the entire 2nd half of the Mass, which we remember is called *The Liturgy of the Eucharist*. This is pretty basic because the name comes from what is about to happen; we are about to receive communion. Therefore, we have just finished the entire Eucharistic Prayer, we have just proclaimed the Great Amen, and now as we launch into the communion rite, we prepare our hearts and summarize all our prayers by praying together the prayer that Jesus taught us word by word, the Our Father. The Our Father is such a simple prayer, but it is loaded with depth and beauty in its content. There are seven different petitions or parts to the Our Father prayer, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church spends a substantial amount of time reflecting on each of these petitions to help us enter most fully into this prayer from Jesus (CCC 2759-2865...so I will not attempt to do that during this reflection!).

However, this does raise at least one important point about the Our Father prayer in general as it relates to the entire structure and approach to the Catholic Mass. One common question that Catholics might get from non-Catholic Christians normally goes as follows, “Why do Catholics repeat prayers; doesn’t Jesus clearly say not to do that when he condemns the Gentiles who ‘heap up empty phrases’ (Matthew 6:7)?” After all, Catholics do repeat many prayers every single Catholic Mass, and they are the same ones all around the world every single weekend (and every day if you come to daily Mass). The answer is that Jesus was talking about repeating prayers MINDLESSLY and FOR THE PURPOSE of gaining the praise of other people or of God just by quantity or visibility of praying (for example, read all of Mt. 6:1-18 and following). In addition, Jesus not only prayed the same prayers over and over again at times (for example, see Mark 14:32-39), but He taught us a specific prayer that we can say in the Our Father prayer. Therefore, we can say with confidence that repeating prayers is not sinful or bad, but we should try to enter into the repeated prayer with the correct mindset and openness of heart to receive the grace God wants to give us in that moment.

Two quick tips for praying the Our Father like a Saint. First, we can just pause and remember that we are speaking to a real person, who in fact, we call this person a father to us. What would THE PERFECT FATHER say to you in your life right now? What words do we need to hear from our dad when times are tough or when we are celebrating a big milestone in our lives? Just making the prayer personal and directed towards a Father in heaven is a huge step that can bring the Our Father prayer to life during each and every Mass. By the way, if you pay close attention to *almost* every prayer during the Mass, most prayers are directed or said as if the priest is speaking to God the Father (rather than being directed towards God the Son or God the Holy Spirit). The entire Mass is one prayer to God the Father, and the priest is offering those prayers because He is representing Jesus, God the Son. Just like Jesus praying to God the Father while He was here on earth, now at every Mass, Jesus takes our prayers and offers them to God our Father in a new way every single time!

Finally, the last encouragement is simply to pay close attention to the words of the Our Father and reflect or meditate on each little petition. You don’t have to do this at each Mass you attend, but once in a while, if you are praying the words of the Our Father during Mass, try to pause your mind and think about what you are actually saying and what that actually means in this moment. For example, “...thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...”, I wonder what that means for me today to do God’s will in my life? God, what do you want me to do in this situation for it to be YOUR will and not my will? We can do this for every single line of the Our Father, pausing and thinking and reflecting and talking to God about it. It is ok if everyone keeps praying the rest of the prayers during Mass and moves on without us. We can pause and meditate and talk to Our Father each and every Mass! Overall, this is a shortcut to Christian meditation in general. Pause, think, reflect, and talk. We can do this with all the prayers at Mass as well! Start small. Start simple with the Our Father. But realize God is speaking to you as a Father, and He wants you to know how much He loves you.