

2021 0617 Thursday after Trinity 2 Havant

“Our Father”.

The opening words of probably the most famous and frequently used prayer in the world.

A very early Christian text, probably from within about 50 years after the resurrection of Jesus, tells us that we should pray it three times a day, and from about 200 AD onwards almost countless books have been written about it most often calling it simply “the prayer”. “**The** prayer” not just because it is a pattern for prayer, but also because it includes pretty well everything that praying requires.

This morning, I shall make just two short comments.

This first concerns the opening address. “Father” was Jesus’ own way of addressing God and expressed his own relationship with God. When his disciples asked him to teach them how to pray, Jesus invited them to share his own intimate relationship with God. I don’t think we can overestimate the importance of this. This is called the Lord’s Prayer, because it is the Lord’s own way of praying.

Whenever we recite it we are not only praying as Jesus taught us, but we are praying with Jesus. We are praying with Jesus as he prayed during his earthly life, but more than that we are praying with Jesus as he now prays, ever living, as the Letter to the Hebrews puts it, to intercede for us. Christian faith is nothing if it is not trust in the God who raised Jesus from the dead.

Jesus did not come to **teach us how to live** - after all, there is not much in his teaching which was not already there in the Old Testament, in the Law, the Prophets and the Teachings through which God had revealed himself to our ancestors - but rather to **enable us to live** as we should. Jesus you see is not a moralist but a saviour, one who sets us free and invites us through our communion with himself to be one with God, or, in a nutshell, to be able to pray with confidence as he taught us, “Our Father”. “Our” because it is ours and Jesus’, and “our” because only Jesus can properly pray to God as “**My** Father”, and “our” because we can never pray to God alone but only with Jesus and each other.

My second comment is especially for the sake of anyone who is troubled by the way in which the prayer of Jesus includes a prayer for forgiveness. How on earth could the sinless Jesus need forgiveness? Here we need to remember that by becoming human the divine Jesus took to himself all the horror and alienation of our fallen nature, even though he himself never departed from the will of his Father. In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus prays out of his communion with us, sinful humanity.

So, having started by affirming his union with God, he goes on to affirm his unity with us. Although personally innocent, he knows the agony of sin, alienation from God. From the lowest depths, he appeals to God for us, who are trapped in those depths. Whenever and for whatever reasons you feel ashamed or helpless, know that Jesus has shared those feelings - and not only **has shared** them but **does share** them.

What could be more wonderful than that? When we pray “Our Father”, we pray with Jesus. **And** when we pray the “Our Father” we know that all our human longings are already heard in heaven,

No wonder, at the end we confidently say, **Amen.**