

THE OUR FATHER WE SAY

*Extracts from the Book: "To Be Like Jesus" by Fr. P. Ribes. s.j.
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Introductory Note;

- ✓ *This exercise was part of a series of sessions on prayer for Novice Masters and Mistresses and other formation personnel at the N.V.S.C. Pune*
- ✓ *The exercise start off with the story "**Dad, teach me to pray**". The story is sort of a parody of the Our Father.*
- ✓ *This exercise aims at*
 - *Cleansing our prayer life from the dross of routine and superficiality*
 - *To discover our immature and unchristian attitudes in our prayer life.*
 - *To provoke reactions from the members of the audience and encourage them to serious reflection and introspection about the wrong unconscious attitudes they may harbor.*

DAD, TEACH ME HOW TO PRAY! (A Story)

Once upon a time, Johnny was taught in school that prayer can accomplish more wonders than the world could think of. When he came home, with boyish sincerity he asked his dad: "Dad, teach me to pray as Jesus taught his disciples". His dad with fatherly frankness told Johnny: "Son, to tell the truth, I know little of what Jesus taught his disciples about prayer, I'll teach you, however, what I learned from pious persons praying at home, in their churches, temples and holy shrines. This is how they pray:

"My Father in heaven', listens to me! Don't let me down. You are my Father.

"Holy be my name". Make people appreciate me and praise me. Grant me the admiration of one and all! Let no one ever criticize me, or run me down. Father, holy is my name!

"May my kingdom come! Father, be with me in all my undertakings. Grant me to be always successful and on the top of all! Do not let me fail in my life! May my kingdom come.

"Let my will be done on earth as yours is done in heaven!!" Grant that I may always see my wishes fulfilled and all my demands satisfied. Do not disappoint me. Let no one ever hinder me from doing my will. I want all my ambitions and desires come true! Father, let my will be done

'Father, give me my daily bread'! Larger and larger profits, Father. Grant me wealth and money. Do not deprive me from my daily comforts and pastimes. Give me my luxuries and pleasures. Yes, father, give me my daily bread!

Forgive me my sins, but, do not expect me to forgive others the sins they did against me! Understand my little human weaknesses, Lord. Do not punish me because of my failures and mistakes. Punish my enemies as they deserve

When I leisurely dip into the pages of porno books and magazine; when I watch all sorts of blue films, when I go to the joints and move in bad companies, kindly, protect me, **Let me not fall into temptation**

Finally, father dear, deliver me from all evils like, illness, poor health, car accidents, heart attacks, robberies, insults, cancer, strikes and labor unions. Father, save me from income tax, police inquiries, stormy weather, bitter cold, air crashes, fires and other similar evils. Amen!”

After learning from his Dad about prayer, Johnny said: “Thank you Dad, for teaching me how to pray. Now, I understand why so many people pray!”

Points for Reflection, Introspection and Discussion.

- Do you find the story true to life or overdone? Explain.
- What thoughts and ideas struck you most? Mention them. Why?
- What feelings the story aroused in you? Mention them.
- Do you feel approved or condemned by the story? How?
- What has life taught you about prayer?
 - How do people pray?
 - Why do they pray?
 - Where do they pray?
 - What for do they pray?
- Is our way of praying in keeping with our Christian faith? What makes you say so?
- Are our attitudes in prayer the ones Jesus taught us in the “Our Father”? Explain.
- Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Give reasons for your answers,
 - In truth, there are two versions of the ‘Our Father’ the one Jesus taught us and the one we use? .
 - Often enough, unconsciously of course, we do not pray to God, but to ourselves.
 - Quite often, our prayers are expressions of our ‘religiosity” not of our religious beliefs.
- Which are the most likely – unconscious - distortions and deviations in our way of praying? Name and describe them?
- What’s the primary purpose of prayer as our Lord taught us in the Our Father, and contrariwise what is – often enough - our primary purpose in our prayers? Mention it.

INPUT; Possible Distortions and Deviations in our Prayer Life.

1. Subconscious motivations prompting us to pray.

- Atavistic approaches to religion:: To placate the divinity,. To ward off punishment, to thwart the divine wrath and vengeance. Vestiges of primitive and tribal religions.
- Infantile approach to religion.. To propitiate the divinity, to win God's favor and good pleasure.
- Legalistic approach to religion: To merit and gain God's love, to set oneself right before God.

2 Lurking hidden wrong images of God/attitudes:

- Thinking of God as a tyrant. Unpredictable, capricious, erratic
- Thinking of God as a strict and demanding judge
- Thinking of God as a task master; hard, exacting, and difficult to please.

Anthropomorphisms:

- Thinking of God as a man
- Projecting on to Him our emotions and feelings.
- Cutting him to size! Trimming his sails to our wind!
- Molding him to our "image and likeness" ...

Distrust and lack of confidence in him:

- Let us pray to God. It's better to believe than not to.
- Better to play safe.
- After all, if nothing comes out of prayer, you lose nothing much, anyway, by praying.

Deep rooted self centeredness

- In a way, making myself the center of the all.
- Trying to get God to do my will rather than me doing His.
- Using God to my advantage.

Superstitious attitudes:

- Believing that some prayers, devotions and pious practices have "in themselves" a power they do not possess. E.g. proclaiming some novenas, devotions and prayers to be very powerful and efficacious, nearly infallible! Thus, implicitly we assume that God is bound to work out the wonders they do for us.
- This is seen by sayings like these: "This is a very powerful novena, "Say this infallible prayer" "Patron of impossible cases". "Wear this medal or scapular and be sure that Our Lord or Our Lady will save you".

A "dues ex machina" conception of God:

- This goes one step further than "superstition"...
- Prayers work automatically by themselves.
- Prayer becomes a mechanical device to force God to intervene in some problem of ours, which cannot be solved by natural means.

Escapism:

- Prayer as a means to run away from the responsibilities of life.
- A gimmick to avoid facing real issues.
- A convenient excuse to shirk one's duties. E.g. .I pray for success in my exams yet, I do not study as I ought.
- A flight from reason.

Presumption – Tempting God

- Praying him not to let us fall into temptation when in reality we do not take the necessary precautions; when, we freely enter into all avoidable occasion of sin...
- Passing the buck to God Expecting him to do the whole thing.
- Putting the onus on him for making good our mistakes.

Ritualism

- Substituting the real thing with a 'rite', i.e., instead of helping the poor, we just pray for them. .
- Being satisfied with external practices of worship i.e. 'ritual worship' and forgetting the true inner self-surrender of ourselves to God...
- Jesus complained of this: "These people honor me with their lips but their heart is far away from me" (Mt 15/8-9)

Opium of the People- Sleeping Dose:

- Praying just as a psychological means to obtain 'peace of mind' like Transcendental Meditation, Yoga, "Jesus Therapy", "Prayer Therapy", etc..
- Prayer as an "anesthetic" to dull ourselves to the pains of life.
- Prayer as a justification or even a rationalization to secure a "good conscience" and feeling good. - *The Pharisee in the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican*

Looking for False Security:

- I feel safe because I have said my "prayers".
- Prayer as an insurance policy against the "wrath" of God.

Pharisaic Attitudes.

- Self-conceit. . I am praying, therefore I am better than those who don't
- I deserve Gods love and justification because I fulfilled my duty towards him.
- Legalistic holiness. I said the prescribed prayers; I go for Mass on Sundays. I say my Rosary, etc. Therefore I am O.K. I m a good Christian...

Individualism:

- "I and God" "Alone with God"
- Rabid "verticalism" Only God counts, others forgotten. The social aspect of prayer is forgotten.
- The "Ecclesial and Communitarian dimension" of prayer is missing.

Emotionalism

- Searching for "cheap consolations"

- Stressing purely the “human and natural” feelings.
- Sentimentalism in prayer life.

Interiorization and Prayer.

Interiorization:

- Slowly, read again the script of the story; “Dad. Teach me to Pray”
 - Now pray to God using the version of the Our Father of Johnny’s Dad.
 - As you pray the new version of the Our Father, get attuned with your feelings and answer the following questions: (*Ideally, put your replies in writing*).
1. What did you feel when praying to God with the new version of the “Our Father”?
 2. Did it ring a bell within you?
 3. Does this prayer reflect some of your attitudes towards God in the way you pray?
 - Which?
 - How?
 - To what extent? :
 4. Keeping in mind the insights and discoveries you made,
 - What are the things you should correct in your prayer life?
 - What steps you are willing take?
 5. Write down some jottings

Prayer:

Pray for a while,

- Ask Jesus like the Disciples: “Lord, teach me how to pray”.
- Request the Lord to heal you from your wrong attitudes at prayer
- Slowly, thoughtfully and with feeling keep reciting the true Our Father

APPENDIX ONE Bible Study.

Examples from the N.T. of people who displayed wrong attitudes at prayer:

- Attentive read the passage.
- Study the text
- Find out what is wrong with the prayer found in the passage.

Mt. 4/1-11	Temptations of Jesus	The Devil’s prayer
Mt. 8/23-26	Calming of the storm	the disciples prayer
Mt 14/12/38-40	Demanding a miracle	The Pharisees prayer
Mt 14/28-31	Peter walking on the sea	Peter’s prayer
Mt 16/21-28	Future Sufferings	Peter’s prayer
Mt 17/4	Transfiguration	Peter’s request
Mt 20/20-23	Sons of Zebedee	A mother’s prayer
Mk 9/17-23	Boy with evil spirit	A father’s prayer
Lk 18/9-14	Pharisee and tax-collector	A Pharisees prayer

Jn 4/4-16	Samaritan woman	Sir, give me this water!
Jn 18/37-38	What is truth?	Pilate's prayer
Jn 21/20-23	Jesus and the other disciples	Peter's request
Lk 9/51-55	Samaritans rejected Jesus.	James' and John's prayer.

Examples from the N.T. of people who displayed the right attitudes at prayer:

- Attentive read the passage.
- Study the text
- Find out what is right and worthy of imitation in the prayer found in the passage.

Jn 1/35-40	First disciples	"Where do you live Master?"
Jn 2/1-11	O. Lady at Cana	"They have no wine!"
Mt 8/1-4	The leper	"If you want you can cure me!"
LK 7/1-10	The Centurion	"Lord, I am not worthy..."
Mt 9/27-31	Two blind men	"Have mercy on us, Son of David"
Mt 15/21-28	Canaanite woman	"Son of David, have mercy on me"
Jn 11/1-16	Martha and Mary	"Lord, your dear friend is sick".
Lk 17/5-10	The father of the lunatic	"Lord, increase my faith!"
Jn 6/34-47	Promise of the Eucharist	"Give us this bread always, Lord"

APPENDIX TWO Suggested Group Activities/

A) Group Sharing and Discussion. Scenes of Every day life..

- Ask all present to compile a list of incidents or scenes they have observed about people praying in a way implying wrong attitudes; like superstitious practices, escapism, presumptuous behavior, pharisaic attitudes, selfishness, ritualism, etc.
- Let them share what they experienced.
- Discuss the incidents, one at a time.
- Draw lessons from them on how to improve their prayer life.

B) Group Role Playing. As a follow up of the Group Sharing and Discussion above.

- Next form groups of 4 to 6 each
- Let the group choose any of the instances given by the group members and role-play it. They can do it in caricature form.
- After each presentation there will be a short analysis, evaluation and discussion.

C) Group Prayer. Closure.

- The event may close with a shared group-prayer..
- For the prayer session you may use the N.T. texts quoted in appendix one. Bible Study.
- Encourage all participants take active part and pray for one another.

Suggested hymns for the prayer service:

Holy lord, we praise thy name
I abandon myself
I just trusting, my Lord
It's me; it's me, O lord
Just a closer walk with thee
Spirit of the living God
This is my Prayer to Thee

I surrender all
How Great Thou art!
Day after day.
Into your hands
Let the lord have his way
Heavenly Father