

## The Our Father

We are going to focus on the Our Father. **In its simplicity, the Our Father is the greatest Christian prayer.** Jesus taught it to His disciples when they asked Him to teach them to pray. The Apostles must have been fascinated by Jesus' prayer, by His intimacy with the Father. Their petition sprang forth from their admiration. "Master, teach us to pray." **Jesus taught them the prayer of the children of God, which sums up in seven petitions the most important aspects of spiritual life.**

**The first petition has a sense of latria, of praise and glorification of the Father (in this sense the doxology continues) and, at the same time, of supplication.** Some authors see a certain union amongst these petitions, such as: sanctifying the Name of God is to do His will and the fulfilment of His will is the presence of the Kingdom of God on earth. In his book, Jesus of Nazareth, **Pope Benedict XVI says that heaven becomes present on earth in the places where God's will is done.** We make our life, our home, a piece of heaven if we seek to fulfil God's will.

**The Our Father was introduced into the communion rite also for its petition for "our daily bread", which is not only material bread, but also the Eucharist.** This can help Christians to understand what the martyrs of Bithynia said when they were forbidden to celebrate Mass: **"We cannot live without the Eucharist."** There can be no true Christian life without the Body and Blood of Christ. **"Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you."** (Jn 6:53) Love of the Eucharist, understanding that there is no divine life without it, leads us to a constant and humble prayer, begging God that we never be without the Eucharist, that we never be without the Mass, **that we never be without priests that give us the nourishment of the Body of Christ.**

**We also ask forgiveness for our sins, favouring in this way humility as a preparation for the reception of Communion.** The recognition of the fact that we are sinners, because we really are, is a necessary attitude in order to receive the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. It is not necessary to clarify that this petition is not enough to forgive mortal sins, which must be forgiven in sacramental confession. However, this recognition of our need for

salvation is a necessary condition to esteem the donation that Christ makes of Himself for us in the Eucharist.

**The Our Father shows us the presence of the Spirit that prays in us and makes us exclaim: “Abba” (cf. Rom 8:15).**

When we ask God to “**deliver us from evil**”, the Church understands that “evil is not an abstraction, but refers to a person, Satan, the Evil One, the angel who opposes God.” (CCC 2851) In the last petition of the Our Father, “when we ask to be delivered from the Evil One, we pray as well to be freed from all evils, present, past, and future, of which he is the author or instigator.” (CCC 2854)

The Our Father, which is prayed during Mass by the priest and the faithful together, is continued only by the priest with the embolism that follows it: “**Deliver us, Lord, from every evil.**” **He asks for the peace of Christ and the protection from all sin and all anxiety “as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.”** The Church, the Bride, reminds us of this loving tension that makes us live constantly awaiting Christ, the Bridegroom. **It is a continual Advent, where the Church rejoices with the presence of Christ, but longs for His return and His presence face to face.**

Lastly, the faithful consummate the prayer with a doxology, which is an echo of the celestial liturgy: “**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever.**” (Rev 1:6; 4:11; 5:13)

The post-Vatican Council renewal of the liturgy has restored the ancient custom, practised as far back as the first Christian generations, of praying the Our Father three times a day, concretely in lauds, Mass and vespers. “**Thus you should pray three times a day**”(Didaque, VIII, 3).

**We should strive to pray the Our Father with a filial spirit. We are children of God and we pray to Him, trusting in the goodness of the Father who gives us the Bread of eternal life, which is “medicine of immortality”** (St. Ignatius of Antioch) and symbol of the glorious future. When we receive Him in Communion, our love and desire to rejoice in His presence should grow. Hence the joyful and confident waiting of the Church, looking forward to the “glorious coming of Christ”, the Spouse that has loved her and has given Himself for her to make her holy and immaculate. (cf. Eph. 5:25)

15 September 2022

Tēnā koutou Priests & Parish leadership,

## **“We cannot live without Sunday”**

*Martyrs of Abitene. 303 AD*

With the recent lifting of all Covid-19 restrictions we are happy to extend an enthusiastic invitation for all Catholics of Aotearoa New Zealand to return to full and active participation in Sunday Mass.

We have lived through difficult times since March 2020, including serious illness and months of restrictions prompted by our concern for the weak and the most vulnerable. We have embraced necessary and often difficult restrictions with precautions to keep our communities, families, workplaces and parishes safe and healthy.

Throughout this time our personal relationship with Jesus Christ has sustained us and we have continued to pray together in innovative and creative ways including social media resources. However, we have longed for the time when we could once again worship together. In recent months this has been possible to an increasing degree and with the lifting of all restrictions we welcome all Catholics of Aotearoa to return to weekly Sunday Mass.

When we speak of our Catholic commitment to Sunday Mass as an obligation, this is not the imposition of an external rule but rather the expression of a healthy heart’s desire. While the projects and successes of the world can bring us significant satisfaction, we Catholics are aware of an inner restlessness which reminds us that only God can give the depth of earthly peace and wholeness that we seek.

We nurture and savour this relationship with Jesus Christ, who is God-with-us in our own life of prayer and recognise that this always draws us to the Sunday Eucharist which, from the time of the first Christians, has always been an event of encounter with Christ which we cannot live without.

Many of us remember a past time when the *Sunday obligation* was carried as a heavy burden, often motivated by fear. In the absence of such fear, we find a new opportunity to embrace Christ’s gift of the Eucharist as something freely chosen, and from which we are dispensed for reasons due to illness or other circumstances which make it difficult to participate.

While many have already begun returning to Mass in these weeks after a Covid-break, this time of lifting restrictions provides an unprecedented opportunity for others who may have been away from Mass for many years or decades to return. If you know of someone who may be uncertain about returning to Mass you might offer to accompany them. If you would like company as you return, don’t hesitate to call a friend and take the step together.



We take this opportunity to remind our Catholic community that the Mass is the ultimate Earthly encounter with Jesus and our Catholic ancestors often made great sacrifices to take part in this weekly event which is once again fully available for each of us.

In the wake of the removal of wider government Covid-19 restrictions, all restrictions regarding the Mass are lifted. It is ultimately for parish communities to decide what changes they wish to make, while always keeping to the fore the concern for those who are most vulnerable. It is important to remember, however, that the lifting of all Covid-19 restrictions does not remove the risk of transmission of infections from Covid-19 or other viruses. We therefore ask every community and each community member to be prudent in retaining particular restrictions as deemed necessary in the interests of continuing to protect the most vulnerable.

As we prepare to receive Holy Communion, we recognise the invitation to enter into communion with the Risen Lord and each other. We question our disposition of heart as we remember the beautiful teaching of St. Cyril who in the late third century wrote: "When you approach...make your left hand a throne for your right hand, since the latter is to receive the King." As we receive the King so may our hands be hands of blessing and service to our brothers and sisters.

We wish to take this opportunity to thank you, the Catholic community of Aotearoa, for your patience, your generous and faithful commitment and your service over the past two and a half years. This has been a time of learning for all of us as we become more aware of our need to care for those who are most vulnerable.

Most of all, we celebrate the opportunity we now have to discover anew the blessings and graces of the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist without which we cannot live.

- ✠ John Dew, Cardinal Archbishop of Wellington, Apostolic Administrator of Palmerston North and NZCBC President
- ✠ Michael Dooley, Bishop of Dunedin
- ✠ Michael Gielen, Bishop of Christchurch
- ✠ Stephen Lowe, Bishop of Auckland, Apostolic Administrator of Hamilton and NZCBC Vice President and Secretary
- ✠ Paul Martin SM, Coadjutor Archbishop of Wellington