



July 24th

THE NEW SHOFAR

The Lord's prayer is the model Jesus gives us for all our prayers. When we pray we should pray like this...

Prayer is the food of faith

Christians have long sought the best way to feed their faith, going back to the time when the disciples first asked Jesus, *Lord, teach us to pray*. Why did they feel the necessity of asking Him this question? It is because Jesus offered a lot of advice about *how* to pray, always stressing the central place prayer must take in the daily lives of believers.

Pray in secret and don't call attention to it.

Pray in groups especially when you need spiritual support.

Pray often, pray briefly, and don't multiply fancy words.

Ask for what you need and you'll get it.

Pray when faced with bad spirits and difficult cases. *Be watchful and prayerfully alert* in times when fear may cause you to be weak.

Jesus also offered parables about effective prayer

In the end though, Jesus taught His followers a very special prayer, one summing up much of His own mission and ministry; one that would be suitable for every situation in which they found themselves living. In good times and in times of struggle.

Pray with humility and honesty, like the tax collector rather than the self-congratulating Pharisee.

Be persistent in prayer, like the widow before the judge.

Forgive your brother or sister before you offer your gift at the altar.

Early Christians found it so useful they were urged to say it three times daily: in the late 1st-century book of the teaching of the apostles known as the *Didache*.

Today the "Our Father" is also prayed at every celebration of the Eucharist, in the liturgies of morning and evening prayer and on many other occasions. It is perhaps the most recognized Christian prayer of all time, one even unbelievers know.

The early church father Tertullian wrote a treatise on the Lord's Prayer. In that beautiful writing he referred to it as *the perfect summary of the whole gospel*. He saw at the heart of the prayer a plea to God to make the coming of His kingdom a present reality. The fulfillment of that kingdom would mean an end of all need. This is why in it we pray for what we need most of all in our lives: provisions, forgiveness for our wrongdoing and sins and protection.

Jesus set out for us the proper way of praying. We must begin first of all with an acknowledgement of the greatness of Almighty God – you are God and we are not! These are the *you* statements with which the prayer begins. Importantly, all Christian prayer should follow the example of Jesus and be addressed, first of all, to the Father. They are then expressions of our humility, and without approaching the throne of God in this way, we run the risk of presuming a status we do not have. We are creatures before our Creator, the lesser before the Greater. The prayer begins with these *you* statements, and only then does it go on to the *we* petitions for ourselves and our needs.

But beware what you say in this prayer!

There are parts of this prayer that should cause us to pause and wonder whether or not we really can commit ourselves to what Jesus is saying. For example, can we honestly say this to God: ***Your will be done.*** Tertullian says we can pray this way because we believe there is no evil intent in what God wills for us. God's will is always for our betterment, wellbeing, peace and happiness. We even believe this in the face of adversity that inevitably comes our way throughout our lives here on earth.

It is when we can genuinely pray *thy will be done* we are able to align ourselves with the dying Jesus on the cross. His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane was the same prayer of commitment and hope. Somehow, He believed, out of all of this suffering and pain inflicted by wicked men opposed to the divine saving plan, His Father's will is already bringing about good – our salvation. This is not about resigning ourselves to fate. It is a positive taking up of what is coming our way, already engulfing us. With unwavering hope we embrace these things with the certainty of faith that God's good will is unfolding all around us.

But Jesus expects even more of us...

Having faith and hope in God's merciful will is one thing. The later commitment we make in this prayer is our asking God to treat us in the same way we treat and act towards others. That should most certainly put a chill down our spines! Think what we are saying here. We want God to forgive us in exactly the same manner in which we forgive others. Here it is a universal form of ***those*** *who sin against us*. It does not allow us to forgive just those who we find easy to forgive. Nor does it give us a way around having to forgive those we believe have wrong us grievously. It is, without exception, committing ourselves to forgiving others, all others, unconditionally. What we are asking God to do at our time of judgment is to treat us in the same way we have treated others during our lifetime. As Jesus noted elsewhere, we are to leave our gifts outside before we go to the altar. Then go back and heal the wounds of division (even if we are convinced ***they*** are in the wrong) and only then, come forward to the altar. Right or wrong, the responsibility rests with us to take the first steps. On this we shall be judged. And who said the Our Father is a simple prayer to rush through without thought!