

## Saturday Catechism: Lesson 19

These details about prayer are in Ralph Martin's book *Hungry for God*. How to fill up on Him? Obviously, He expresses Himself in His creation. We can soak Him up by absorbing creation. When we observe His presence, He flows into us. While good, that type of prayer pales compared to accepting God in His Revealed Self: Jesus. As Martin says on page 26: "When we sense the presence of God in Jesus, and open our hearts to Him, His Spirit becomes joined to our spirit. In a mysterious, but very real and experiential way, we begin to partake of a new life that is not subject to sin and death. We walk in newness of life that consists not simply in the forgiveness of sin, but also in the discovery that the Father of Jesus is now our Father."

What does it mean to be our Father? A weak likeness is what it means to be a human father. Martin says: "When my first child was born, I went to look at him in the nursery. As I looked at him, something opened up deep within me. I had never experienced the love a father has before. It was partly my instinct as a man for his firstborn child, but it was also the Father within me working through me to be a father to my son, John. I experienced a depth and tenderness of love for John that I had never experienced before. Through it I learned of the depth and even the fierceness of the love of God for us, His children." 27

Martin reminds us to experience our love, such as it is. When we do, we feel an echo of the original Love which is God the Father. Probe into our human love, and we find Love Himself. Because He took flesh to be with us, God integrates us into the flow of His love. Christ's continued presence with us maintains His connection with the Father. That's how we contact God the Father by accepting Jesus. As perfect God and perfect man, Christ reveals God best. Jesus brings God to us most completely. Nothing else comes close.

Each of us knows that our human fathers let us down. That hurts. Each father fails each child in some ways, often in disastrous ways. "Because of the failings of our earthly fathers, ... We need more than ever to experience the perfect, pure, powerful love of our Father in heaven. Only there will true healing be found; only there will the deep wounds be healed. The distortions of fatherhood we may have experienced need to be healed by experiencing true fatherhood, the Fatherhood of God Himself. There is something deep within us that needs to rest in the secure love of the Father, and only that will satisfy us. Therefore, as painful and awkward as it may be, we need to open ourselves, allowing Jesus and the Spirit to show us the Father and His love." 28

That sounds familiar. Father-failures are all too common. Jesus shows us the Father, so He can heal those failures. People today often scream that they hate God, because their own fathers harmed them. So that's exactly the place to start healing this damage. Jesus is just the healer to do this, because He embodies God the Father, as the Love that He is. If we allow Jesus into our lives, He shows us the Father's love. The Father reaches out to all, offering them the ecstasy of His love. Christ comes to show us Trinitarian ecstasy, as 3 divine persons unite completely. The Father of this Trinity is perfectly healing Care. In Care, each Person is the same. Each person does what we see Jesus do. The other Two are invisible, but Jesus shows them to us in Him.

Martin helps us see that. "Encountering God in the person of Jesus, and coming to grips with His claims as Savior and Lord, are significant, decisive, steps in coming to know God. Jesus is *the* door of direct and personal access to God. But our commitment to Jesus only opens the door. We are intended by God to walk through it into the fullness of His life. Those who have committed their lives to Jesus can expect Him to unfold to them a deeper and deeper knowledge and experience of God.

"At the heart of Jesus' desire for His disciples is that they come to know God as their Father. In the last days of His earthly life, in fact, he spoke urgently and clearly of the relationship His disciples were to have to God as their Father, similar to the relationship that Jesus Himself had with the Father. ["That you may be one as I and the Father are one." John 10:30; John 16:28] As we commit our lives to Jesus, and accept Him as our Savior and Lord, we need to let Him show us the Father." 29

This is a great definition of prayer: "letting Jesus show us the Father". The prayer that Christ gives us is the "our Father". It is the perfect way to address Our Loving Father. When we say that familiar prayer, pay attention to every word. St. Therese of Lisieux often said that she could not get beyond the "Our". It stunned her that God would belong to us. When we struggle to pray, say the Our Father, considering each word. The Rosary

is another way to pray, in words that express so well our commitment to God. These words open the mysteries. Familiar prayers relax us into mystery, letting them penetrate our hearts. When we accept the mysteries, we become the mysteries. For example, when we let the Agony in the Garden into our depths, we become that agony. This unity with Jesus unites us with the Father, especially as Jesus prayed the Father “Thy will be done”.

Everything that we express in words fails to say how those simple prayers unite us with the Trinity. By reviewing the mysteries that Jesus lived, we accept them more completely. That’s true of each prayer and of the mysteries we contemplate as we recite that rosary. Every step of the way expresses our gratitude that God created us, that Christ redeemed us, and that the Spirit guides us. You say that’s too much to compress into a set of Our Fathers and Hail Marias. You are correct. **We** could not compress all that. But the Trinity prays in us, and has no trouble compressing all that. When we allow Jesus to live in our hearts, He brings his Best Friends.

Each member of the Trinity shares His ecstasy of Love with us, drawing us ever closer by love into Love. Each member provides personal flavor to the Love which God is. You probably noticed that the Father resembles bread, the Son salt, and the Spirit sugar. Naturally, none of these Person is mere created stuff like that. But the Father’s Love is Father-flavored. The Son’s Love is Son-spiced. The Spirit’s Love is Spirit-spread. Jesus introduces us to the other Two so that we can learn how ecstatic their union is. Christ invites us into the very center of God’s life. He treats us not as servants, but as family-members. Somehow we know that while we pray. That’s why we hate to skip prayers. That’s why our best experience of the day is to pray.

Martin traces the steps we take. “When we first think of the way in which Jesus reveals who God is to us, we think of His mercy and compassion in forgiving sin and healing the sick. From these we conclude, rightly, that Jesus reveals to us the mercy and compassion of God. But Jesus is intent on revealing, not just the characteristics or attributes of God, but the identity of the Persons of God, the astounding fact that God is a union of three Persons, and that it is into that union that He invites His disciples. 29

“With this relationship in mind, read the Gospel of John, and notice the remarkable frequency with which Jesus speaks of the Father, and the remarkable things He indicates about the relationship they are in. Seeing what relationship the Father and Son are in is very important, for it is precisely this relationship that we are offered a part in. Is it into this relationship that Jesus has been preparing us to be drawn.”

“As I read John’s Gospel, I counted 108 references that Jesus makes to His Father. He is always talking about His Father, and the picture that emerges of the relationship is one in which there is an utterly profound commitment of love between the Father and the Son, and a total self-giving of one to the other.” 30

This union that Jesus offers us is the very union of the Three in One. Their relationship of Love is exactly what Christ offers us. He does not want us to stop short of Love. He wants us **in** the infinite Joy that Love is. He wants us in the heart of the Trinity. Starting with the Father, Whom everyone knows as Creator, Jesus reveals Himself to be God also. He is God, but a different Person from the Father. They love each other infinitely. Love unites, so they are infinitely united. This infinite unity is precisely what Christ wants us to join. Staggering isn’t it! But true. When we allow Jesus to pray in us, the Father and the Spirit pray also. So we live, by prayer, the eternal unity that is our destiny. Jesus lives this unity, and reveals it to us, so that we may join it.

“Just as Jesus does everything to please the Father, and gives His whole life in service of the Father, so too does the Father give everything to Jesus, and totally commits Himself to an absolute support. Just as Jesus honors the Father, so too does the Father honor the Son. The Father gives the Spirit to Jesus ‘without reserve’. This phrase characterizes their whole relationship. They give themselves to each other ‘without reserve’. They share a profound intimacy. Only to the Son, Who abides in the heart of the Father, has the Father shown Himself fully, Jn 1:18. And because of the nature of the relationship, it is through the Son that the Father gives Himself to others. He has entrusted to Jesus the work of reconciling the world to Him, to ‘put all things into His hands’ And he never leaves Jesus alone, but is always with Him, Jn 16:32. Just as Jesus abides in the heart of the Father, the Father abides within Jesus, and accompanies Him, works with Him, in all that He says and does, so much so that Jesus can say: ‘He who has seen me has seen the Father ... I am in the Father and the Father in me. ... I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father Who dwells in me does His works’, Jn 14: 9, 11, 10.

“The total commitment that the Father and Son have to one another is finally and vividly expressed as Jesus gives Himself up to suffering, crucifixion, and death, as the fullest possible act of abandonment in trust of the Father possible to a man. And the Father receives Jesus, and raises Him up from the dead, and establishes Him at the right hand, restoring Jesus to the glory He had before the world began. Jesus and the Father glorify one another, honor one another, raise one another up, out of a staggeringly profound and complete love, union, and self-giving, out of a relationship that gives them a remarkable joy, peace, confidence, and security. And this is the relationship into which God desires to draw us.” 30-31

This fine review of prayer barely scratches the surface. I hope that it reminds you of your deep prayer.