

*A scientist approached God and said, "Listen, we've decided we no longer need you. Nowadays, we can extract stem cells, clone people, transplant hearts, and all kinds of things that were once considered miraculous."*

*God patiently heard him out, and then said, "All right. To see whether or not you still need me, why don't we have a little man-making contest!"*

*"Okay, great!" the scientist said.*

*"Now, we're going to do this just like I did back in the old days with Adam and Eve," God said.*

*"That's fine," replied the scientist and he bent down to scoop up a handful of dirt.*

*"Hold on!" God said, shaking his head. "Not so fast, pal. You get your own dirt."*

In today's Gospel, we hear the episode of what is sometimes called "The Giving of the Our Father." We are, most likely, very familiar with the prayer – it is a part of the Mass, it is part of the Rosary, it is part of the Liturgy of the Hours, it is part of the Divine Mercy Chaplet.

The "Our Father" is often called 'the Christian family prayer,' because it is one way that all the diverse denominations of Christianity can agree to pray.

Since we are so familiar with the "Our Father," I thought I'd borrow an analytic technique from a 13th century Jewish philosopher called the *Via Negativa* – that is, the Negative Way – to take a look at the prayer in a way that may help us to gain a deeper understanding of it ... by examining what it is not.

In the first place, the disciple who approaches Jesus doesn't say "Lord, teach us to do all those cool miracles that you do," or "Lord, teach me how to wipe out my enemies." Instead he asks, "Lord, teach us to pray."

Jesus had sent out 72 of His disciples and they had cured the sick, cast out demons ... no problem, so it would seem. But the one thing that they found difficult was how were they to pray.

The prayer begins "Our Father," not "My Father," or "His Father," or "Her Father," or "Yo! Father." God is Father to all of humanity, and no one person has cornered the market on God. This is because, like the Trinity, which is a family or a community of persons – in our own families and communities, we strive for the same relationship as the Divine Persons, although in our situations we never achieve perfection in this life.

We could look at the rest of the prayer by substituting a different pronoun in all of the places one occurs ... "my kingdom come?" ... "my will be done?" "give me this day my daily bread?"

None of that is in the prayer – yet oftentimes this seems to pervade the thinking of modern day men and women. We have the "Me Generation," online you can customize "My Space," and on and on. All of this begins to sound like a toddler who runs around

shouting “Mine! Mine! Mine!” or for you *Lord of the Rings* fans, like the Gollum trying to recover the ring that has taken his very soul.

Again, we are called into community ... to live as a family ... in imitation of the Most Holy Trinity. And the only way to do that is with God’s Divine Assistance.

The lack of selfishness or self in the “Our Father” can be distilled in a sense down to one word:

HUMILITY.

The Church recognizes five main types of prayer, all of which stem from humility. Adoration - is recognition of God’s place as Creator, and our place as someone created by God.

Petition - is an asking in our own poverty of spirit for what we need from God. In the first place, this is NOT a new car, a new TV, or a winning Lotto ticket. Rather, the first thing we need from God is forgiveness. No one of us can say that they have ever placed God in the first place for their entire existence. In fact, I think we’re hard-pressed to keep God in first place for a few seconds. After forgiveness, our petition should stem for a desire for the Kingdom of God.

Both of those petitions are found in the “Our Father.”

Intercession - is a sharing in the prayers of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ – who is the One Intercessor between God and humanity. When we intercede for others, we share - not only in the mission of the Church, but - in the mission of Jesus Christ.

Again, we find prayers of intercession in the “Our Father.”

Thanksgiving - is a characteristic of the community prayer of the Church, and finds it’s highest form in the Eucharistic celebration in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. We don’t come to church on Sundays to punch a ticket - or at least I hope not. Rather, we come to share in the Church’s great prayer of Thanksgiving.

Finally, we come to prayers of praise.

Praise is prayer which recognizes in the most immediate way that God is God ... and that we are not.

But in all of this, prayer is our response to God’s love for us. God doesn’t love us because we loved Him first; He loved us even when we didn’t care about Him. And our prayer comes in response to God’s love and mercy – not the other way around. And so today, as we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ – let us ADORE, PRAISE, and THANK God for the gifts we have received - most especially the gift of prayer ... let us ASK for what we need, beginning with mercy and a desire for God’s Kingdom; and join our prayers to those of our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ ... as we move ever deeper into our Eucharistic Liturgy.