

Ten After Ten Session 131: Our Father, continued

2786 “Our” Father refers to God. The adjective, as used by us, does not express possession, but an entirely new relationship with God.

2787 When we say “our” Father, we recognize first that all his promises of love announced by the prophets are fulfilled in the new and eternal covenant in his Christ: we have become “his” people and he is henceforth “our” God. This new relationship is the purely gratuitous gift of belonging to each other: we are to respond to “grace and truth” given us in Jesus Christ with love and faithfulness.

2788 Since the Lord’s Prayer is that of his people in the “end-time,” this “our” also expresses the certitude of our hope in God’s ultimate promise: in the new Jerusalem he will say to the victor, “I will be his God and he shall be my son.”

2789 When we pray to “our” Father, we personally address the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By doing so we do not divide the Godhead, since the Father is its “source and origin,” but rather confess that the Son is eternally begotten by him and the Holy Spirit proceeds from him. We are not confusing the persons, for we confess that our communion is with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, in their one Holy Spirit. The Holy Trinity is consubstantial and indivisible. When we pray to the Father, we adore and glorify him together with the Son and the Holy Spirit.

2790 Grammatically, “our” qualifies a reality common to more than one person. There is only one God, and he is recognized as Father by those who, through faith in his only Son, are reborn of him by water and the Spirit. The Church is this new communion of God and men. United with the only Son, who has become “the firstborn among many brethren,” she is in communion with one and the same Father in one and the same Holy Spirit. In praying “our” Father, each of the baptized is praying in this communion: “The company of those who believed were of one heart and soul.”

2791 For this reason, in spite of the divisions among Christians, this prayer to “our” Father remains our common patrimony and an urgent summons for all the baptized. In communion by faith in Christ and by Baptism, they ought to join in Jesus’ prayer for the unity of his disciples.

2792 Finally, if we pray the Our Father sincerely, we leave individualism behind, because the love that we receive frees us from it. The “our” at the beginning of the Lord’s Prayer, like the “us” of the last four petitions, excludes no one. If we are to say it truthfully, our divisions and oppositions have to be overcome.

2793 The baptized cannot pray to “our” Father without bringing before him all those for whom he gave his beloved Son. God’s love has no bounds, neither should our prayer. Praying “our” Father opens to us the dimensions of his love revealed in Christ: praying with and for all who do not yet know him, so that Christ may “gather into one the children of God.” God’s care for all men and for the whole of creation has inspired all the great practitioners of prayer; it should extend our prayer to the full breadth of love whenever we dare to say “our” Father.

2794 This biblical expression does not mean a place (“space”), but a way of being; it does not mean that God is distant, but majestic. Our Father is not “elsewhere”: he transcends everything we can conceive of his holiness. It is precisely because he is thrice-holy that he is so close to the humble and contrite heart.

“Our Father who art in heaven” is rightly understood to mean that God is in the hearts of the just, as in his holy temple. At the same time, it means that those who pray should desire the one they invoke to dwell in them.

2795 The symbol of the heavens refers us back to the mystery of the covenant we are living when we pray to our Father. He is in heaven, his dwelling place; the Father’s house is our homeland. Sin has exiled us from the land of the covenant, but conversion of heart enables us to return to the Father, to heaven. In Christ, then, heaven and earth are reconciled, for the Son alone “descended from heaven” and causes us to ascend there with him, by his Cross, Resurrection, and Ascension.

2796 When the Church prays “our Father who art in heaven,” she is professing that we are the People of God, already seated “with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” and “hidden with Christ in God;” yet at the same time, “here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling.”

[Christians] are in the flesh, but do not live according to the flesh. They spend their lives on earth, but are citizens of heaven.