

The book cover features a warm orange background with a subtle sunburst pattern of fine lines radiating from the center. Overlaid on this are several speech bubbles of varying sizes and shades of orange. A large, white speech bubble is positioned in the center, containing the title text. The words 'The' and 'FATHER' are in a smaller, bold, black sans-serif font, while 'OUR' is significantly larger and also in a bold, black sans-serif font.

# **The OUR FATHER**

**WORD**

**WORD**

**BY**

edited by Jennifer Fulwiler

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# Share Your Thoughts

I'd love to hear your thoughts as you read! You can connect with me on social media at:

- Facebook: [facebook.com/jen.fulwiler](https://facebook.com/jen.fulwiler)
- Twitter: @[JenFulwiler](https://twitter.com/JenFulwiler)
- Instagram: @[JenniferFulwiler](https://www.instagram.com/JenniferFulwiler)
- Snapchat: @JenFulwiler

I look forward to hearing from you!

Jen

P.S. If you would like to share this book with friends, they can get their own free copies at [JenniferFulwiler.com/Our-Father](https://JenniferFulwiler.com/Our-Father) — I hope they enjoy it as well!

# Introduction

By Jen

I love it when people sign up for my email list.

As much as I enjoy Twitter, Snapchat, Facebook and other social media, there's still something special about keeping in touch with good old fashioned email. I feel like my email list subscribers are my friends, and I often share things in that format that I don't share anywhere else.

Because of that, I wanted to do something to give back to my email friends. I often can't correspond with people individually, so I wanted to create something I could offer to each of you as a token of my affection.

After batting around a few ideas, an idea came to me: the Our Father series!

Back in 2011, I hosted a series of essays in which I invited some of my favorite authors and bloggers to write reflections on each word of the Our Father. The finished product was more brilliant and beautiful than I could have imagined, and I have been flooded with requests to turn it into a book ever since then. I had never done anything with it due to the time and effort required to compile all of the writing, but now I realized that this is something I could do as a gift to my email subscribers.

So here it is, a labor of love that I assembled for you. I am proud to be able to highlight the work of such a fine collection of contributors, and I hope you take the time to look up their websites and books to get to know them better. I think you'll agree that this is a truly special series of reflections that will give you an entirely new perspective on this most important of prayers.

# OUR

By Jen

**This, to me, is one of the most startling** words of the Lord's prayer. Maybe *the* most startling.

I have a feeling that it wouldn't be as remarkable to someone who comes from a different cultural background, but I am an American and a Texan. I come from one of the most individualistic states in the most individualistic culture in the world.

The Christianity that I grew up around very much had a "Jesus and me" flavor to it: you had your Bible, your personal relationship with Jesus, maybe a church community whose purpose was to help you grow in your personal faith, and that's pretty much all you needed.

Even the college kids who dabbled in Buddhism or Wicca approached their beliefs in a very individualistic way: Buddhist meditations were about retiring to a secluded place and focusing on your inner self; the Wiccans sought earth goddesses and



cosmic energy as a kind of mystical self-help technique. I'd never seen another way of approaching faith.

This blindspot would end up being a critical roadblock to my belief in God.

"It makes no sense that God would make us jump through the hoops of joining a church," I'd say to my husband when I was first researching religion. "Why wouldn't he just reveal himself to each of us individually? It would skip so much red tape and misunderstanding!"

**In my hardwired individualistic mentality,** I could not see any advantage to this inefficient system that made us go through the Bible and churches and word-of-mouth to get to God. Until I took a close look at the Our Father.

*Our.*

It's plural.

When Jesus' disciples ask him how to pray, he puts the words of a *collective* prayer on their tongues. He instructs his followers to address their Father as a family.

Once I understood this, it answered so many of my questions. Yes, it would be more efficient if God simply revealed himself to each one of us and told us whatever we needed to know. But if he

did that, what would happen? We would withdraw from one another. Our natural human tendencies toward selfishness and self-centeredness would creep in until we each lived on our own little islands. And so he came up with the perfect plan:

The entirety of God's revelation to man occurs through other people. In other words: **We have to draw near to one another to get to him.**

Being an extreme introvert as well as an extreme individualist, it's easy for me to slip into that mindset where I forget that my prayers should not be all about my own little world. At Mass, I sometimes find myself irritable at the crowds (especially when it's time to get out of the parking lot) and I wish I could worship alone in a secluded chapel. But then I hear that first word of the Our Father, and it serves as an instant reminder of the truth around which God has centered his entire system of revelation: *We're all in this together.*

# FATHER

By Marcel LeJeune

**I am a terrible father. It isn't that I treat my five kids badly** or that I am a dead-beat dad. In fact, if you asked most people they would say I am a pretty darn good father. But, I am not. I stink at fatherhood. This is because I am not God, who is the only one who truly fulfills what it means to be “father.”

When we think of the word father, we think most often of the men who raised us and gave us life. Some of these fathers are pretty good and some of them not-so-good. Regardless, our image of fathers is caught up with the man who gave us life and/or raised us. In many respects this is natural, for they truly are fathers in the biological and social senses. But, when we search a little more we discover that our human fathers really do not encompass the totality of fatherhood, because only in God is true fatherhood found.

We find the fatherhood of God in The Trinity, which is a family by nature. God The Father is the person who loves and who gives

all that He is to the one who is loved by Him — The Son. The two of them together give themselves to one another and receive the other in love. This love is so powerful it explodes into the third person of the Holy Trinity — the Holy Spirit. Thus, we have the definition of family within the Trinity, and thus the very definition of Fatherhood in God the Father.

As humans we cannot naturally be called God's children, for we do not share the same divine nature. But, through the grace of Jesus we are adopted into God's family by baptism.

This Sacramental relationship of God and his adopted children is beyond our capability to fully grasp it, but we must try because *everything* depends on it.

**Think of how little human fathers love their children in comparison to God's love.** This limitation in love that every human father has that leads most of us into a distorted image of God's love. In other words, we sometimes view God's love as we do our earthly father's love — limited, broken, and weak. We need to untwist the lies of how God loves us to be able to truly know the Father, pray to the Father, and live in relationship with the Father.

When my kids think back to how slow I am to forgive them, will they think that their heavenly Father will be slow to forgive as well?

When my kids think of the times I am grumpy, will they think God can be moody and unresponsive to their needs?

What about the times I sin against them? Will my children believe that God will fail to love and accept them also?

I pray this isn't the case. Yet, the truth is God's love is so much more than we realize.

Our Father loves us so much that He created the world for you and me.

If you take all of the rest of creation, ball it up, and place it right next to you, then you would be amazed at how The Father looks at the contrast between the Universe and His child. What He sees isn't incomparable – you are the one He loves more than the rest of the world. In fact, God values each one of us more than all of the rest of His creation added up. Christ died on a cross and rose again so that we might have life eternal with Him. **He didn't die for the stars, the mountains, the animals, or the universe.**

He died for you and me. That is what Fathers do. They love without fail.

This is why I am a terrible father and God is not. I know that many who read this reflection might think that I am a bit too hard on myself, but I don't think so. I have a lot to work on and it doesn't come from a false sense of pride. But, rather from the understanding that my children aren't "my" children – they are God's children first. I am merely their earthly father who has been given the great task of raising up His children.

**What a humbling call.** To think that the one who created us for Himself would entrust me with the crown jewel of the created order — one of His children. But, I must remember another fact: I am one of His children also!

God loves you and me as He loves His only begotten Son — with everything He is. It isn't as if He holds back His love for us. He can't. When the Father loves, He does so with an infinite and all-powerful love and one that is never-ending.

In fact, we can't make God stop loving us. There is nothing bad enough that you or I could do to negate or stop His love.

What a Father we have. Our Father.

*Marcel LeJeune is a Catholic speaker, author, blogger, and evangelist. He is also the Assistant Director of Campus Ministry at St. Mary's Catholic Center at Texas A&M University, the largest campus ministry in the country. Marcel and his wife, Kristy, have five children.*

# WHO

By Cat Hodge

**“And in praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do...” (Mt. 6:7)**

We don’t have to question whether each word of the Our Father is worth studying, since in the moment before Jesus gave his disciples the model of prayer, he assured them that it wouldn’t contain any “empty phrases.” So even the word “who,” which most people rush through to get to the fun parts such as “hallowed” and “bread” and “evil,” illuminates God’s nature.

“Who” is a *personal* pronoun. The pronoun “which” might have implied that the Father is simply a vast cosmic force or an archetype or a remote ideal. But three words into the prayer, Jesus assures us that the Father is, primarily, a person. Unlike an archetype, the Father can and will respond, person to person, to **us**.

**This is huge. It’s awesome, in the literal sense of that abused word.** The Father is not only to be worshipped and revered



and feared, but to be known and *to know us in return, as a person*. And as a person, He can't simply be acknowledged (as an archetype) or propitiated (as a force) or studied (as an ideal). Now we have to respond back to His desire to have a relationship with us, which seems like a daunting burden in a world where even forming a good relationship with one's earthly father can be a royal pain.\*

Pope John Paul II offers an answer: "The person is a good towards which the only proper and adequate attitude is love." This is doubly true of God, who is both a person worthy of love, and Love itself! It might seem a little recursive, maybe, to maintain that the One who is all Love needs our love, which comes from Him in the first place, but Jesus has that covered as well: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (Luke 20:21) The only thing worthy of offering to God is Himself, and the only response to a person is love, and God is Love. This beautiful circle, in which we participate in the life of God by offering Himself to Him, is the perfect reciprocal personal relationship.

Finally, a note for the grammar fans: The Greek of the scriptures had no punctuation, and neither does the first phrase of

the Our Father. Thus, the “who” can be both restrictive (the Father’s location is Heaven) and descriptive (of our fathers, we are addressing the one in Heaven, not on earth). The Latin (*Pater noster qui es in caelis*) and the Greek (Πάτερ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς) both contain the same construction — according to my classics-major husband, so pick your linguistic bones with him, not me.

*\*Your father, not mine. My dad is the best ever.*

*Cat Hodge blogs at [darwincatholic.blogspot.com](http://darwincatholic.blogspot.com) with her husband Brendan. She homeschools her six kids in a grand old house in Delaware, OH, and writes novels as a hobby.*

# ART

By Brandon Vogt

**When I was younger, I used to believe God lived in outer space.**

I just knew he dwelled on some distant, undiscovered asteroid in the far reaches of the Milky Way. And I figured that one day, a group of astronauts exploring the solar system would accidentally discover God's hidden heaven. "Aw shucks," God would bristle, snapping his fingers in frustration, "you found me."

Now that I'm (slightly) older, I see how unlikely this scenario is. We will never completely find God deep in outer space, nor in an African cave, nor on a Brazilian mountaintop. God's fullness simply won't be discovered in our galaxy — not because he isn't real, but because he is beyond our categories of space and time.

**When Jesus prays to God who "art" in heaven, he isn't providing clues to find God's secret lair.** Instead, he's hinting at a foundational fact of the cosmos: "God is. He *is* the ground of all being, and wherever 'he is,' *there* is heaven." Or as the

Catechism more clearly states, the prayer's opening expression does not refer to "a place, but a way of being."

God's being is unique. He isn't one being among billions and he doesn't live in one place amidst many. So to the atheist who begs for evidence of God's existence — a crater from God's heavenly asteroid or a hair from his dangling beard—the Church says, "Impossible!" It can't happen — not because God doesn't exist, but because he transcends all of our earthly categories — all labels, all boxes, all definitions. He can't be grasped, he can't be measured and probed; he can't be "bigger", "closer", "wiser", or "older" than anything else in our world: he simply "is"; Our Father who "art."

Which of course brings us to the book of Exodus. For there, after being charged with delivering a message to his people, Moses asks God's name in exchange. God, who can never lie, replies bluntly, "I AM." Later, when Jesus' own identity is questioned, he too adopts the same puzzling name: "before Abraham was, I AM."

The title is confusing, especially when we try to fit it into our own understanding of identity: "You are *what*? No, seriously, *who* are you? *Where* are you?" But when placed next to the

opening words of Jesus' prayer, the answer makes more sense: **God just...is.**

Which finally takes us to the people who best understood this identity: the saints. Note how almost all the saints are known not only by their names, but also by their locations. St. Clement of Rome, St. Francis de Sales, Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, and St. Therese of Lisieux all find their names intimately tied to their places of being. **The saints show us that, at least here on earth, your “where” is wrapped up in your “who.”**

And it's the same with you and me: right now we're known as Brandon from Casselberry, Jonathan who lives in Albany, or Cindy from down the street. But as St. Paul says — and here's what the saint know best — we must always remember that 'heaven' is our true homeland, the place ultimately connected to our identity and the land our souls longs for. We were made not to be “Joe who art in Albuquerque” but “Joe who art in heaven.”

St. John Chrysostom says it this way: Jesus describes God as the one “who art in heaven” not to “limit God to the heavens,” but to lift us from the earth. The “art” doesn't so much point to where *God* is right now, but to where *we* eventually will be.

So as we pray to “Our Father who art,” may we ponder the startling reality that God simply is, but may we also sail onward to our true homeland. As we draw closer to “Our Father,” the One “who is,” we near the day when we too will forever be him or her who “art” in heaven.

*“Heaven, the Father’s house, is the true homeland toward which we are heading and to which, already, we belong.” – Catechism of the Catholic Church (#2802)*

*Brandon Vogt is an award-winning author, blogger, and speaker. He's written several books including RETURN: How to Draw Your Child Back to the Church and The Church and New Media. He works as the Content Director for Bishop Robert Barron's Word on Fire Catholic Ministries.*

# IN

By Brendan Hodge

**Reading word by word, we find the Lord's Prayer a study in contrasts.** With “art” we soar into abstraction — God as pure being, the great I AM — and now with “in” we find ourselves suddenly speaking of the concrete. Our Father who art *in* heaven...”In” speaks of place.

“Hey, hon, where’s the cat?”

“Oh, she’s **in** the freezer.”

Talking about God being in heaven sounds as if it puts Him in one place, and thus not in others — the old-man-in-the-sky vision of God which young children sometimes have.

St. Augustine writes of God in Confessions Book 1, Chapter 2:

“Can even heaven and earth, which you made and in which you made me, contain you? Or, since nothing that exists could exist without you, does this mean that whatever exists does, in that sense, contain you?”

When we say God is “in” heaven, we can think of this in a literal sense, as in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* in which, reaching the highest sphere of heaven, Dante sees God surrounded by all the saints and at last ends his poem, rendered speechless by the Beatific Vision which is, even to this most imaginative of religious poets, indescribable:

“Here powers failed my high imagination:  
But by now my desire and will were turned,  
Like a balanced wheel rotated evenly,

By the Love that moves the sun and the other stars.”

(*Paradisio, XXXIII: 142-145*)

But perhaps more profitably, we can think of God being “in” heaven in the sense that Augustine speaks of. God is in heaven in that heaven is the full and consuming experience of God. Heaven is not a place, nor is God contained or limited by any thing. He is not “in” heaven the way a cat can be in the freezer. Rather, He is in heaven in that it is through the full communion with God for which we are intended that we truly find God.

Our Father is in heaven. Heaven is that destination for which we were made, that thing for which we yearn, and it is in heaven that we shall find Him.



*Editor's Note: No cats were harmed in the making of this post.*

*Brendan Hodge is professional pricer, sometimes blogger, and amateur novelist who writes with his wife, Cat, at the [Darwin Catholic](#) blog.*

# HEAVEN

By Steve G.

*If you really come down to any large story that interests people...or can hold their attention for a considerable time...the story is practically always a human story, it's practically always about one thing isn't it...death!...the inevitability of death...*

*There's a quotation from Simone de Beauvoir that I read in the paper the other day which seems to me to put it in a nutshell...I think I'll read it to you.*

*"There is no such thing as a natural death. Nothing that happens to man is ever natural, since his presence calls the whole world into question. All men must die, but for every man his death is an accident, and even if he knows of it and consents to it, it is an unjustifiable violation."*

*Now you may agree with those words or not, but those are the key springs of the Lord of the Rings.*

*– J.R.R Tolkien, from a special on Tolkien and the LOTR done by the BBC in 1968*

*When I put on my psychologist hat, my own observation...that most people who have depression, or anxiety, or neurosis...way way down...are afraid of death.*

*– Fr. Benedict Groeschel, Hope in the Lord – Episode 11*

**Why would I open a reflection about heaven with a quote from J.R.R. Tolkien** (a devout Catholic) about death, and a quote from Fr. Groeschel (a holy priest and psychologist) about mental illness?

Because they bring out, I think in a profound way, an issue that is intimately intertwined with Heaven and how we should think about it. This connection is also made for us by Fr. Groeschel in his wonderful little book *After This Life*.

His advice is that we should NEVER think about death without thinking also about the eternal life which we call heaven, and vice versa. “These two mysteries,” he writes, “are each halves of the same whole, they are two sides to the same coin” (p. 85). It is only heaven that gives us hope to face the un-faceable...the unjustifiable violation mentioned by Tolkien. Heaven and the hope it offers is our most powerful weapon against the fear and

reality of death. Do we regularly ponder how powerful a weapon it is...this Hope of Heaven?

Think about how the world, how we at times, really think of life, and of why we really sin. If we are honest, I think we'll see that we all feel...cheated...that this precious life has been sabotaged at various points, by the hurts and pains of life. It's been rigged against us even from the outset, and the hurts and wounds we suffer seem monstrous. We desire healing, we desire wholeness, but hope often fails, and we feel that time will run out on us before things can be made right.

So we are faced with this ominous shadow hanging over us, and as we grow older we see that we may lose it at any point through illness or misfortune, and so we often turn to things that give us pleasure, or distract us from the dark reality that time is running out. **That is why we are always in such a rush, isn't it?**

I want to get on with this duty or obligation, so I can move on to something related to making myself at least feel better...something to 'medicate' against the pain...because time is running out.

And look around us at this mess of our culture. Listen to the music, watch the movies, and talk to young people today. Modern

life has given up something more critical than faith, it has given up hope; it has given up heaven, and has become overwhelmingly dark and despairing. Without the hope of heaven, how could it be otherwise?

But we Christians, we have the real medicine for this unjustifiable violation, this accident of death...we have the Hope of Heaven. And if that hope is real for us, if we can hold our eyes fixed on heaven as our eternal destiny in a vital way, we should realize that we need not be in a rush to fix everything at once. We should instead take the next good step, attend to what God has put before us, and see that in heaven, we will have an eternity for God to heal our wounds, to fix the sabotage, and to make things right.

**Death tells us that time is running out.** Heaven tells us that we have literally all the time we'll ever need.

Pray for an increase in hope for yourself. Pray for an increase in hope for me. Pray for an increase in hope for all your loved ones. Pray for an increase in hope for the entire world. And in the midst of those prayers, remember that Heaven is where our Father dwells...and it is the same place in which our hope resides.

And let us also remember that through the cross and resurrection that we look toward, Christ has shown us the way to that blessed realm we call heaven.

*Steve G. was one of the first commenters on Jen's blog when she was exploring faith and had a tremendous impact on her conversion.*

# HALLOWED BE

by Melanie Bettinelli

## **Hallowed.**

To hallow is to make holy.

The Hebrew word for “holiness,” has the connotation of “separateness.” Something holy is set apart, special. The Holy of Holies in the Temple was a place where only a few might enter. Only men who were consecrated priests, set apart from all other men. And only on certain days and after performing certain rituals to cleanse them and make atonement for their sins.

Likewise the tabernacle in a Catholic church is set apart. Up, away, behind, apart. Within the sanctuary of the Church, itself a space set apart for the purpose of worship, it is the holy of holies, the place that is veiled and hidden from our sight. The light of the lamp, the gleaming gold reminds us that something precious is within.

The Catechism says that “The holiness of God is the inaccessible center of his eternal mystery.” (2809 )

But now I feel like I've backed myself into a corner. This seems to say that holiness is something other and apart, unknowable mystery, and has nothing to do with me. How do I even begin to approach "inaccessible mystery"? Let's start again.

***Holy, holy, holy***

It is the song of the angels. It is the call of the psalms.

Holiness is a hard concept for me. It's slippery. As soon as I think I've caught up to it, it turns into a fish and slips off the hook.

If I were to imagine what holy looks like, I'd picture it as the gold of the tabernacle, the chalice, paten and ciborium, the gold ground of an icon or the halo of a saint, the golden gleam of a mosaic on a dome arching overhead. The gleaming white of clean altar linens. The worn polished look of stone or wood where believers have walked, knelt, touched, generations upon generations of prayer made visible.

My senses know what holy is; but my mind wrestles to pin it down.

Holy is a shine in the eye of my girls at Mass.

Holy is the whispered name, *Jesus Jesus, Jesus*.

Holy is silence.

Holy is a voice chanting, seeking heaven.



Holy is a hand clasp.

Holy is prostration. A body stretched face down on a hard floor.

Holy is remove your shoes this ground is holy.

Holy is death if you touch it when you are not.

Holy is cleansing.

Holy is renewing.

Holy is peaceful.

Holy is painful.

Holy is worship.

Holy is praise.

Holy is the Lord alone.

Holy is the spirit.

Holy are the saints.

Holy are the angels.

**My first thoughts when it comes to the holiness of God's name** is to return to my primary school understanding of the second commandment: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." Boy did I struggle with that one when I was younger! I fell into bad company and picked up a verbal "OMG" tic. Shedding it was so hard. Habits stick so firmly. But eventually

I did kick it. And yet I'm still a bit shocked when otherwise pious ladies I know use it as thoughtless punctuation.

But all that aside, I know that to simply refrain from profaning the Lord's name isn't enough to fulfill the command implied by this first petition of the Lord's prayer: "Hallowed be thy name." To fully answer the call of this petition demands a positive action.

**What does it mean to hallow?** To make holy. Only God, the Holy One, can make holy. For us this command means to recognize the holy, to treat it in a holy way. Thus it seems to me we are to recognize God's name as something sacred, set apart. But at the same time we are also called to realize that the revelation of his name is a gift, a call to intimacy. Abraham did not know his name; but followed his call anyway. In the vision of the burning bush Moses received a revelation of who God is: "The God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob." "I Am." This revelation was an invitation to action and to relationship. In hearing God's name Moses entered into a deep intimacy with God. Finally, in Jesus we have the most complete revelation of God's name, the revelation of God's self: God with us, God who saves. And we have the possibility of a new relationship. To be adopted, to be sons and daughters. Intimacy.

To know God's name, to hallow it, then, is to be in a relationship with God. But what does that mean, exactly? How do I have a relationship with God? The Church has an easy answer: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. But I'm going to stick with prayer for now.

**The psalms call us to praise his name always:**

“Blessed be the name of the Lord  
both now and forever.  
From the rising of the sun unto its going down,  
may the name of the Lord be praised.” (Psalm 112:2-3)

In part this petition is a call to prayer, a call to praise God's name, to give thanks to his name for its saving power. I wake and begin to pray, start the day with praise, the psalms on my lips. I pray the psalms again at set times through the day. I pray spontaneously during the day. I end the day with prayer.

But it is even more than that. More than spoken prayers or even contemplation. The catechism tells us that this petition immerses us “in the innermost mystery of his Godhead and the drama of the salvation of our humanity.” (2807)

Think about that for a minute. It immerses us in the innermost mystery. **Mystery here does not mean foreign, set apart; but**

**instead we are invited to become a part of the mystery.** We are called to make God's name holy within ourselves. I was made in his image and likeness. I am called to bear that image, to become more and more like him. To become a tabernacle myself, a vessel in which God's name may be hallowed.

More, it immerses us in the drama of the salvation of our humanity. God became man. Is there any more dramatic tale ever in the history of the world? We are called to be players in that drama, to enter into the story. Not just read it or listen to it. To live it. To allow myself to be caught up in the action. To fall and rise. To take up arms and fight. To sin and repent. To confess and be made whole. To give up, give in. To take up my cross. To be healed. To become whole. To become holy.

To hallow the Lord's name is to seek to fulfill the commandment: "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy." To hallow the Lord's name is to burn with passion for the name as did the prophets and patriarchs of old.

God's name is hallowed in us through our actions. How can I make every moment this day a prayer, a blessing? How can I hallow the hours and thus hallow God's name and thus enter into

his holiness? Not only in prayer, but in every deed, every moment? This is the challenge of “Hallowed.”

*Melanie Bettinelli is a mother of five who homeschools her children in the suburbs of Boston. She blogs about books, poetry, faith, art, food, and education at [TheWineDarkSea.com](http://TheWineDarkSea.com).*

# THY

By Jen

**“I like your new glasses,” I said in Spanish** to one of our friends from Mexico the other day. My grasp of the language is rusty enough that I always have to think carefully as I speak, and one word I was sure to get right was “your.” In Spanish there is a formal (“su”) and informal (“tu”) version of the word, and with our friend I was sure to say “su.” Though I am familiar with her, having known her since I was a toddler, we are not quite close enough that it would be appropriate for me to say “tu,” and thus I use formal address when I speak to her.

It was stunning, then, when I came across a Spanish translation of the Our Father and saw that the word “thy” is translated as “tu.” Informal.

In English we don’t have formal and informal words, but there is an old tradition of addressing people in high places differently: in fact, when subjects addressed royalty, they didn’t typically say “thy” or “your” at all. If someone were to ask a queen if she

wanted tea, they wouldn't say, "Would you like your tea now?" but rather, "Would Her Majesty like her tea now?" Not speaking directly to her would be a sign of deference to her high position.

And so it is a shock that not only are we allowed to address the King of all, the *Creator* of every single thing that exists, directly, but that we are encouraged to refer to him in a casual way. I wouldn't speak to my Spanish-speaking neighbor down the street using "tu." He's not a close friend. **And yet this is how I am told to speak to the One to whom I owe my entire existence.**

I believe that it is with this word, this informal "thy," that the shocking message of John 15:15 hits home. For Jesus turned our entire understanding of our relationship to God on its head when he told us, "I no longer call you servants...Instead, I have called you friends."

# NAME

by Karen Edmisten

*And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. ~Acts 4:12*

When I ponder the idea that God has a name, I am struck by what an intimate, personal, powerful thing that is. My husband has a name, my children, my friends, my family — the people with whom I have a relationship. When we give names to inanimate objects, it's said that we're personalizing them. **Names allow relationships.**

Our Father has a Name. He's not an "it" — not an object, an impersonal force or a distant mechanic. He is a Person. With a name. When I first inched toward Christianity, after years of atheism, I thought a lot about that idea. I was stunned to think that we share this characteristic with Him.

A *name*. It's what we whisper to our beloved. It is what we bestow on our babies after much careful consideration. Names



call to mind friends, sisters, fathers, heroes. Names identify us, shape us, and connect us.

**In Scripture, a name often defines a mission,** and a name change indicates a vital change in one's role and purpose. Thus Abram becomes Abraham, Sarai becomes Sarah and Jacob is transformed into Israel. Simon becomes the rock and Saul is shattered, resurrected as Paul. One name defines the mission from the start: Jesus means, and is, our Savior.

“Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9-11)

**Names have meaning. I become my name, it becomes me.** My name is who I am but that began with the origin of all things, with God — He has a Name, at once precious and holy. I, in a certain sense, am my name. I am Karen. But He — He is simply I AM. He exists in a way that I cannot and do not. But at the same time, He wants me to have a share in that existence, to be part of what He is. To be called by name.

“But now thus says the Lord, He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.’” (Isaiah 43:1)

**We are made in God’s image and likeness in other ways —** He’s given us both a will and an intellect, after all, just as He possesses — and so why not in this way? Why not, the Divine Mind must have mused, give my creatures the intimacy of names?

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe.” (Proverbs 18:10)

I can barely fathom Who and What God is, but when I call on His Name, when He calls mine, I have a glimpse of what He intends for me and for all of His creatures — an intimate, eternal, holy connection. And I am changed forever by I AM.

“...for He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His Name.” (Luke 1:49)

*Karen Edmisten, a convert from atheism, is the author of several books, including You Can Share the Faith: Reaching Out One Person at a Time (Our Sunday Visitor, February, 2016), After Miscarriage: A Catholic Woman's*

*Companion to Healing and Hope, and Deathbed  
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# KINGDOM

By Matt Swaim

**Nerdier readers of this post may be familiar with the idea of cartoon physics**, the notion that things in the world of cartoons work differently than they do in ours. For instance, in cartoon physics, gravity only works on a cartoon character that walks off the edge of a cliff when the character happens to look down. More pious readers of this post may also be aware of the concept of what I call “Kingdom physics,” the idea that in Christ’s re-ordering of things, the last become first, and the first become last; those who exalt themselves become humbled, and those who humble themselves become exalted. Simply put, what willfully goes down must come up.

Upside down-ness is only one aspect of the idea of Jesus’ explanation of the Kingdom of God that can be confusing; the more confusing thing is the idea of a kingdom, period. Most of us live in democratically ordered societies, where the will of the people rules the day. In American society, for example, it is not

the government who employs us, but rather we who employ our governors.

Because of this, it can be a very difficult thing to wrap our minds around the idea of what it means for Jesus to have established a kingdom here on earth. Citizens of countries like ours likely find it easier to understand Jesus as the President of Presidents in the Democratic Republic of God rather than the King of Kings in the Kingdom of God. **We prefer to subvert authority rather than appoint it; that's why most elections end up being more about firing people than hiring them.**

There can be no kingdom without a king, and no king without subjects. It may be easy to look at Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God as a sort of "power to the people" manifesto, and indeed, many have taken such a view. Justice for the downtrodden is a key tenet of our faith, but it is not the ruling tenet. The ruling tenet is obedience to the kind of king that can secure that kind of justice.

**Obedience trumps sacrifice over and over again in the Scriptures.** It might be tempting for those of us who live in countries governed by democratic processes not to pray "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," but

rather, “my empowerment come, our collectively bargained will be done, at home as it is in Sweden.” The trick of it all, however, is to learn what it means to be a subject, rather than a voter, since the ruling principles of the life we’ve signed up for are already established.

The Kingdom of God is not of this world, but that doesn’t mean it’s without a king.

The Kingdom of God is not an empire, however; Jesus doesn’t force his kingdom upon us any more than he forced a Jewish rebel uprising against the Romans of his day. We are not made subject to his will, despite the assertions of Calvinist theologians; we make ourselves subject to his will. Doing so means surrender; and no surrender comes without having been preceded by a fight, in this case, an internal one against our own concupiscence.

The Kingdom of God on earth, namely the Church Jesus founded, has always been spread most effectively when it has relied upon the upside down laws of Kingdom physics: sheltering the widow and the orphan, feeding the hungry, tending to the sick, and exercising charity when callousness seems to be the easier path. Ultimately, our loyalty to the Kingdom of God is rooted in

our loyalty to the King himself, who repeatedly reminds us that the way to glory is through sacrifice.

Last of all, for those enthusiasts of early 90's Protestant hair-metal ballads, you should know that *In the Kingdom* by Whitecross was running through my head during the entire creative process of crafting this article. *Viva Cristo Rey!*

\*apologies to TeenMania enthusiasts

*Matt Swaim is Communications Coordinator for the Coming Home Network. His books include Prayer in the Digital Age and Your College Faith: Own It!*

# COME

By Jen

*Maranatha.*

This is one of the simplest, oldest prayers of the Church. It's used by Paul in his first letter to the church in Corinth, and is usually translated as: "Come, O Lord."

*Come.*

When I first pondered this, I was struck by the power and the beauty of this simple phrase. From the Creed, we know that the Lord will come again *in glory*. As Abbot Joseph Homick points out in his excellent book *How Lovely is Your Dwelling Place: Lifting the Veils on the Presence of God*, the petition for the Kingdom to come is one "through which we long for the end of suffering and sorrow and the beginning of the eternal life of peace and joy in the unveiled presence of God, with all his holy ones."

How lovely! What a pleasant thought!

And then I realized something that made this simple prayer take a more serious turn: To pray for the Kingdom to come means



something for me. It's not just a concept. It's not just a nice thing that I might passively experience. It requires something on my part.

“**Repent**, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” says John the Baptist in Matthew 3:2.

“**Repent**, for the kingdom of heaven has come near!” Jesus preaches repeatedly, beginning in Matthew 4:17. And the Lord continues:

“Unless you change and **become like little children**, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:3)

“No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are **born again**.” (John 3:3)

“Blessed are the **poor in spirit**, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:3)

In the first chapter of 2 Thessalonians, Paul says that those who don't **obey the Gospel** will be punished when the Lord's Kingdom comes.

Oh.

When I think about these passages from the Scriptures, I no longer see that beautiful *maranatha* prayer as a request that requires God to act while I sit around and soak up the goodness.

It is indeed beautiful, but it carries with it a weighty question: Am I really ready, right now, for God's Kingdom to come?

# WILL

By Dorian Speed

When Jennifer first asked me to write a guest post, I was honored. And I knew just the word to choose: “Will.”

About five minutes later, the ramifications of this choice hit me hard. “WHY COULDN’T I HAVE PICKED ‘AND?’” I asked the heavens, rhetorically.

I mean — this simple word (a four-letter word, at that) encompasses so many of the essential debates within Christianity. Are we predestined for salvation? Does God cause our suffering? Why do some people receive answers to their prayers while others go apparently unheeded? If our original sin was a response to external temptation, where did Satan get the idea to rebel against God? And why do mosquitoes exist?

That kind of thing.

I decided to narrow my scope; to focus on Jennifer’s Will for This Guest Post, rather than trying to do a One-Stop Shop for Answers About God’s Will. Pretty sure Jennifer willed for me to

turn this post in on time and for it to not exceed 20 bazillion words, for starters. So I'm going to neglect some of the philosophical questions about God's Will and play a little something I like to call "The Lord's Will: Ur Doing It Wrong."

Well – YOU are probably doing a bang-up job of living your life in accord with God's Will, but I'll tell you the various ways in which I myself go astray, so that you can recognize the symptoms in your friends and family.

**1. "Thy Will Be Done, and please grant me the humility to accept with grace the awesome, unlimited success, adulation, and happiness you have clearly plotted out for me over a three to five-year period, as outlined in a series of plans and action items I have mentally tabulated."**

This one's pretty much hardwired in my brain: the constant making of plans and the expectation that all will proceed accordingly, for the greater glory of Me, I mean, God. Of course, right there in Isaiah 55, he tells us, "As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways," but I still find myself saying, "Okay, but if I put my plan inside a really nice report cover, you'll sign off on it, right?"

And then, when it becomes apparent that I really am not going to get everything I've planned for, I stomp out of the room, and go with:

**2. “Clearly, Lord, you are going to do whatever you want, so I am just not even going to talk to you about what’s going on in my life, Thy Will Be Done.”**

This is sort of the flip side to #1. When I'm mad that things aren't working out according to My Plan, I take the extremely mature approach of giving the Lord the silent treatment, as it were.

I'm being flippant, but really this has been a huge struggle for me. At various points in my life, when Stuff Went Down, so to speak, I found myself at a loss for understanding why things weren't working out for the best — at least, “the best” as I understood it. I'd think of St. Teresa of Avila, having been thrown from her horse alongside a river, telling God, “If this is how you treat your friends, no wonder you have so few of them.” I fashioned myself in the same predicament.

And, of course, looking back, I can see my folly in throwing myself into the pursuit of some lofty goal, pushing aside the costs

to my own children and my family life, convinced I was going to Make a Difference and Change the World. Which leads me to...

**3. “Thy Will Be Done, Lord, by me as a sole proprietor, charged with the salvation of all humanity...”**

Surely it all depends on me! Never mind the housekeeping, there are people out there who need me! There’s no time to lose, Lord! Help me stay strong as I solve the world’s problems! Make arrangements for the laundry!

So...I’m thinking the error here is probably evident, but I’d also like to point out that just because we may have good intentions, and be using our talents for the glory of God – it doesn’t mean that all of our efforts are always going to work out the way we envision.

When we’ve put our heart and our talents into a creative effort or an act of service, it’s tempting to feel betrayed if it doesn’t come to fruition as we had hoped. We may question whether our choices were even God’s will in the first place. Was it because we strayed from his path that we experienced failure and frustration? Hindsight may someday reveal to us how the Lord was at work, bringing good out of the situation – maybe even despite our

efforts. But it can be tough to continue to trust in God when it seems like the gifts we've offered have gone to waste.

**4. “Have fun, Lord, off doing Your Will, don’t mind me while you’re changing the fabric of the universe...”**

We can feel like the tiniest speck of dust in comparison to the vastness of Creation – like God isn't even noticing our little lives, isn't listening to our prayers.

That gives us lots of time to fear for the future and imagine all of the possibilities that may befall us. Jesus asks us in Luke 12, “Can any of you by worrying add a moment to your life-span? If even the smallest things are beyond your control, why are you anxious about the rest?”

And he doesn't mean that those details are left to chance, but that God is intimately involved, ever-present, in each of the “small things” in our lives. The Lord isn't off in some remote corner of the universe or sitting with his feet propped on his desk, surveying us from afar – he is “near to all who call upon (him)” (Psalm 145:18.)

So, now that I've examined a small, small subset of the many ways in which I come at understanding God's Will from all the

wrong directions, I'd like to point you towards the exemplar that God Himself provided for us: His own mother.

Mary's *fiat* – “Let it be done to me according to your word” – that's what I strive for, in contemplating God's will. Her “yes” was not just a single, grand gesture – at every moment, her soul magnified the Lord. And it was by trusting *completely*; submitting her *everything* to his will, that she proclaimed his greatness.

I approach this with tiny steps — at a Mom's Day Away conference, speaker Danielle Bean gave a terrific talk on approaching our day-to-day challenges with the response, “Yes, Lord! What now?” Truly, that's the only way we can live in harmony with God's will for our lives — not by focusing on the future and trying to pursue grace at the end of all possible rabbit trails, but by submitting ourselves to Him in the present moment. It means we have to surrender all of our plans, our fears, and our frustrations, but it's the only way we can genuinely pray: Thy Will Be Done.

*Dorian Speed lives with her family outside of Houston.*





# BE DONE

By Jen

**As the crucifixion approaches, we hear Jesus speak the words, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will.”**

*Thy will be done*, he says. And then he is abandoned, betrayed, ridiculed, tortured and nailed to a cross.

This is what always makes me a little nervous about the subject of God’s will: Though God never actively wants suffering for us, sometimes it is his will to permit it to happen. Sometimes it’s even really, really bad suffering. And so how can we ever get up the courage to say honestly, “Thy will be done”?

Dr. John Bergsma once wrote a fascinating essay called *Why Must the Messiah Die?* where he made the point:

*Jesus cites Psalm 22 from the cross. The so-called “Cry of Dereliction,” (“My God, My God ...”) is, of course actually the first line of Psalm 22.*

*I think Jesus' cry from the cross is over-read theologically sometimes, as if it indicated that Jesus felt utterly separated from the Father or lost the Beatific Vision.*

*I do not contest that Our Lord's sufferings were extreme, and difficult for us to comprehend, but the Cry of Dereliction is not proof that he lost the Beatific Vision or experienced radical separation from the Father.*

*The psalms in antiquity were almost certainly not known by their present numberings, because the numbering systems varied according to different editions of the psalter (for example, Qumran's 1QPsalmsa). The way to refer to a psalm was probably by its first line — a practice similar to the traditional Jewish naming of biblical books by their first words (also done in the Catholic tradition with Papal documents).*

***So when Jesus cites “My God, My God...” from the cross in today's Gospel, he is really making a reference to all of Psalm 22, inviting the bystanders to interpret what is happening to him in light of this psalm.***

*With that in mind, fast forward to the end of Psalm 22. How does the Psalm end?*

This is one of the more interesting ideas I've heard in a long time, that perhaps Christ's cry from the cross was as if he were saying, "Psalm 22!" It encapsulates so much more than the specific moment of unfathomable suffering that the Lord was enduring. In fact, it unlocks the whole mystery of God's will and tragedies. It makes sense of how a loving God could permit all the bad things that happen in the world, and gives us the confidence to pray without hesitation, "Thy will be done."

**So how *does* Psalm 22 end?** On a note of triumph. It is a joyous statement of the truth that God brings good out of every evil, a reminder that there is nothing so terrible that God cannot bring good out of it; not even the murder of his beloved Son. It tells us one of the most important truths we can know: that to say "Thy will be done" is to proclaim a joyous expectation of the triumph of good.

*All who sleep in the earth will bow low before God;  
All who have gone down into the dust will kneel in homage.  
And I will live for the LORD; my descendants will serve you.  
The generation to come will be told of the Lord, that they may  
proclaim to a people yet unborn the deliverance you have  
brought. (Psalm 22:30-32)*



# ON

By Jen

**Of all the heresies I might have fallen into** if it weren't for the Church, I've often thought that Gnosticism would be at the top of the list.

I have little use for the physical world. I would be content to just sit motionless and do intellectual or spiritual exercises all day. I once saw a science fiction movie about a man who was nothing more than a brain kept alive in a jar, and my gut reaction was, "What a great life!" So the idea that the material world is useless and maybe even a little evil is an easy sell for me.

Especially once I came to believe in God, it sounded reasonable enough to say that the spiritual world is all that matters, that we can completely disregard all non-spiritual realities. After all, it is our souls that are of the realm of God! It is the spiritual realm that is our final and true home!

But then we have this little part of the Our Father, where we specify that our requests are to take place *on earth*. The Lord's

Prayer is incredibly efficient in its use of words, so it's interesting that Jesus takes the time to add the "on earth as it is in heaven" part. Wouldn't it be sufficient to say, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done" and leave it at that?

When I meditate on this word "on," it reminds me of the truth, counterintuitive to people like me, that the material world is not to be disregarded or disdained.

**God is an incarnational God. The second person of the Blessed Trinity became flesh, and walked *on* the earth.** The Sacraments use elements of the material world as conduits of grace. Our souls are of God, but they are also inextricably entwined with the material world. On the Last Day our bodies, that part of us tied to the material world, will be resurrected.

So yes, we humans are spiritual creatures, part of the divine drama of the spiritual realm. But it is a drama that takes place in the material world, on earth.

# EARTH

by Erin Arlinghaus

**“Earth” is one of those words that has one good,** solid, fundamental meaning — the stuff we stand on, the solid ground — and a hundred metaphorical meanings that sometimes obscure the simple word itself. It’s dirt; it’s a planet; it’s “land” — not the waters, not the air — what you leave when your plane takes off and return to when it touches down. “Earthy” means plain, honest; “earth tones” are muted, flat colors; we have the fine old pagan metaphor of “Mother Earth” to call upon. We call ourselves “earthlings” from time to time, thinking we name our species after our home planet; but we’ve known it as “the stuff we stand on” longer than as a celestial body, so really the name “earthling” derives, too, from plain old dirt.

(Not so different from “Adam,” when you think of it. Humans have been identifying with dirt for a long time. Or, as my mother used to tell me when as a kid I’d crossed some line, *Your name is mud.*)



So which of all these meanings and metaphors is the Lord employing when he teaches us to pray?

*Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.*

**What do I mean when I recite “on earth?” It’s got to be more than “standing on the dirt.”** When turbulence frightens some poor nervous airplane passenger into a recitation of the Lord’s Prayer, he has no doubt that “on earth” includes him and his seatmates and the pilot. Nor does it exclude the astronauts in orbit, or even the purpose and action of machines that we might someday send to the far reaches of the stars.

But “Earth” can’t be so expansive that it means “wherever the people are and act,” either, because some humans are in heaven and the phrasing distinguishes the two.

From sources outside the prayer, we know of other conditions of personal existence, bringing the total to four. There’s Heaven. There’s Hell. We know about Purgatory.

And there’s Earth.

By process of elimination, “Earth” — the place that is neither heaven, nor hell, nor purgatory — has to encompass not just the thin little dirty rind of our planet, from the depths of the oceans to the heights of the skies, but the whole of all the other planets, all

the other stars and galaxies, every material location, every event cosmic and common — even the stuff we call “space” and “time.” And maybe it’s more even than that. Back to the words of the prayer itself:

The prayer teaches us that Heaven is the place where God’s will is done.

It also teaches us that Earth is the place where God’s will may be done.

**Heaven is the reality, Earth the shadow.** Heaven is the model to which, in praying, I strive to conform the Earth. What’s interesting about this is that I don’t actually need to know any details about Heaven or about God’s will that is done there, in order to beg God to please make it happen just that way here on Earth. I only need to be willing to ask that, however God’s will is done there, can he please let it be done here, too?

Which, if you think about it, is a rather astounding leap of Faith that Jesus asks us to make. **He teaches us to ask an omnipotent being for something we have never seen:** God’s will done perfectly (“as it is in Heaven.”). When I pray the prayer He taught us, I am asking him, *Hit me with everything you’ve got.* To put it bluntly, I don’t even know for sure that I would like it at all if I

got it! None of us know what God's perfect will done on Earth would look like. An Earth, as "earthy" as it's ever been, but transformed and perfected. Jesus urges us, "Trade this Earth in, for what's behind door number two."

This Earth — our Earth — has been since its creation the place where God's will may be done. Strange to think that before the fall, Adam and Eve could say, "God's will may be done, and it is." Only after did Earth become a place where God's will may be done, but is not.

**So: wrapped up in that word, "Earth," is the entire mystery** of a God that would make anything at all besides Himself. Why is there Earth, and not just Heaven?

It's strange to think, too, that if Earth is the place where God's will may be done, that though I am told to ask God to make it happen (everywhere on Earth, I suppose, for that's what "perfectly" would mean, and that's how it is in Heaven, our model), there's also a little tiny part of it all that's under my direct control. In me and around me is a little place where God's will may be done, and by my own hands. I am not Earth, but I have a little Earth to tend for Him. May I tend it in accord with His will.

*Erin Arlinghaus blogs at [Bearing Blog](#). She lives in Minneapolis with her husband and five children.*

# AS IT IS

By Brandon Vogt

**Have you ever heard of the legendary King Midas?** Besides fathering a son who is known as the “demonic reaper of men”—not his proudest achievement—Midas had a strange gift: anything he touched turned to gold (kind of like a Phrygian Steve Jobs.)

Midas came to mind when I considered the “as it is” part of Jesus’ great prayer. Though Midas’ story is likely embellished, I think his gift is certainly real. The power to make pedestrian, bland, ordinary things sparkle is no mere fairy tale: it’s precisely the power we beg for in this part of the prayer.

Now, before we move into “as it is” in heaven, we first need to ponder “*how* it is.” **Many angry atheists accuse Christians of focusing on heaven to the neglect of the earth.** But despite those accusations, we must begin by gazing upward. “If you read history,” C.S. Lewis reminds, “you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next.”

**So, *how* is heaven?** The best answer comes not through a book, but through an experience: the Mass. The Mass isn't some entertaining program that invites us to regularly tune-in for advice—that's not the Mass, that's *Oprah*. The Mass, in its fullness, is instead a doorway to another world, a peek behind the heavenly veil, fuel for us wanna-be Midases. Through the Mass, we don't just step into heaven—heaven steps into us.

At the heart of every Mass, the Eucharist pulsates as the ultimate “as it is in heaven.” When a piece of ordinary bread changes into the Body of God, we witness precisely what Jesus was praying. Throughout, the liturgy allows us to experience all the things perpetually happening in heaven: community, healing, beauty, and worship.

**But we don't find heaven only in the Mass.** We see it in the saints, too. Consider Mother Teresa lifting a neglected street boy, confirming his dignity through her smile. *That's* the way it is in heaven, we say to ourselves. Consider St. Damien of Molokai rinsing the wounds of lepers, washing away their loneliness at the same time. *That's* the way heaven is. Or look at Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati contracting polio by rubbing shoulders with the poor—that friction, though it killed him, typifies heaven's love.

Each of these saints scraped off the pains of our world in order to coat them with healing and beauty. Each of these saints, in other words, brought love to earth “as it is” in heaven.

Once we taste heaven through the Mass and the saints, then we bend our attention to earth. Note the direction of Jesus’ prayer. In the “Our Father,” it is the earth that is slowly being transformed into heaven, not the other way around. **As much as we desire to be “lifted up” to heaven, this prayer actually encourages us to pull heaven downward.**

This means that we must parade heaven’s banner toward the hellish gates of our world, the ones that Jesus says will eventually crumble. Then, we extend our golden touch. To the hell of hunger our hands bring relief; to the hell of loneliness our touch brings community; to the hell of abuse our arms bring rescue. We plant beauty in worn down tires, proclaim grace on filthy walls, and redeem symbols of death. We drift to the margins, die to ourselves, and lift the boots of sin, seeking to make “all things new” as they are in heaven.

**Ultimately, though, the “as it is” is aimed at us.** In heaven we’ll all be saints, but the “as it is” begs God to make us saints *now*. So as we pray these words, may we become saints on earth,

as in heaven. And may we harness the power of Midas, transforming the dull into the divine. Just as Midas' touch brought forth gold, so may *our* touch bring forth heaven.

*Brandon Vogt is an award-winning author, blogger, and speaker. He's written several books including RETURN: How to Draw Your Child Back to the Church and The Church and New Media. He works as the Content Director for Bishop Robert Barron's Word on Fire Catholic Ministries.*



# HEAVEN

By Jason Anderson

**Heaven is where you want to be.** I know it's where I want to be. Whether you're talking about Hamburger Heaven or Mattress Heaven or whatever, when you describe it with that word it always conjures the same image. It's the ideal, the perfect, the most dearly desired. It's where you want to be.

When someone refers to heaven, we understand the reference immediately, and we're just lowly earth-dwellers. Imagine how much more it means when it's coming from someone who actually has some experience with the place.

**Jesus tosses off this reference to heaven like someone talking about his hometown,** wishing things here were more like back in the old 'hood. But He knows better than anyone the weight of the reference. In that phrase, He tells us not only something about heaven but also about the nature of He who runs the place.

Because we all know what heaven is, but what is it that makes heaven heaven? What is the fundamental difference between Jesus' old 'hood, and ours? Based on the compare/contrast Jesus offers here — “thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” — there is one crucial distinction: in one place, God's will is done; in the other place, it isn't. And that makes all the difference.

On earth, God tolerates all manner of shenanigans from us — our whims, our viciousness, our selfishness. In short, our sin. In heaven, He tolerates no such thing. His will is done, fully and completely. His will, and no one else's.

**To earthly ears, that sounds like tyranny** — the total, unquestioned rule by one over all. But in heaven, it's... heaven.

Because that's who God is. He is the perfect, the ideal, the most dearly desired. The fantasy that's been planted in our heads by years of exposure to marketing about what makes something “heavenly”—the perfect turkey sandwich or the perfect relationship or the perfect life—that fantasy is a shadow cast through a foggy lens on a cloudy day. It can't come close to the reality of God's heaven. And it's as real as stone. And in His perfected love, it's what He wants to give us.

**There is a gulf between our lives and our perfected lives,** between where we are and where we should be. That gulf is exactly as wide as the distance between our will and God's will for us. Where those two things are the same is the place we call heaven.

*Jason Anderson is a Birmingham, Alabama web developer who blogs about culture, religion, and other fun stuff at [JasonRAnderson.com](http://JasonRAnderson.com).*

# GIVE

By Anna Mitchell

**GIVE. Grammatically speaking, we have hit a turning in the Lord's Prayer.**

It's easier to see it in the Italian rather than in the English, so bear with me here. The first three verb phrases are as follows: *sia sanctificato* (hallowed be), *venga* (come), and *sia fatta* (be done). These are all in the subjunctive tense, which expresses a wish or desire. We desire His name to be hallowed, we hope for His kingdom to come, and we pray for His will to be done.

Then we arrive at today's word, *dacci* – da, meaning give, attached to *ci*, which means us. The interesting thing to me is that at this point in the prayer we have now abandoned the subjunctive tense for the imperative: **Give is not a wish or desire, it's a command.** Jesus teaches us to instruct God to give because, as the Catechism states, “it glorifies our Father by acknowledging how good he is, beyond all goodness” (CCC 2828).

To give a command implies that you expect the request to be done – often in a timely fashion. And so when we command that God give us our daily bread, we fully expect Him to actually give it to us.

And give He does.

When I think of the word give, it's hard to ignore the message of *Gaudium et Spes* (which is the crux of John Paul II's Theology of the Body). It says that "man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself." Jesus, without a doubt, is the perfect example of such giving. Not only did He give His life once for the salvation of our souls, He continues to give Himself to us every day in the Eucharist.

We're called to mirror that self-emptying, self-giving love in our own lives.

**We must remember, too, that a gift requires both a giver and a receiver.** If we're going to ask for something, it goes without saying that we should be willing to receive it, right? And if we are willing to receive it, don't you think we should use it?

In demanding and subsequently receiving the Eucharist – which is freely given to us – we are transformed, and become part

of the Body of Christ. That does not come without responsibilities. Just as Jesus gives His body (of which we are now a part), we need to give our own lives to His mission: In the Prayer of St. Francis we say, “For it is in *giving* that we receive.” In John 20, Jesus tells His disciples, “As the Father has sent me, so I *send you*.” In Mark 10 He tells us, “Whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all.” In Romans 12, St. Paul tells us, “Offer *your bodies* as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” (all emphases mine).

**It’s a cycle of self-giving.** We command God to give, so He gives. If we receive, He commands us to give in return.

The Catechism says that “the trust of children who look to their Father for everything is beautiful.” We have asked for, and the Giver has given, the gift. It’s there for us to take whenever we want it. The challenge for us is to be good and worthy receivers of the perfect Gift from the perfect Giver. It is only then that we are able give as He gives.

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# US

By Margaret Berns

**When Jennifer asked me if I'd take a word for this series,** she wondered if the word "us" was okay. "I'll take it!" I said, and then asked if I got to write five different posts.

One for "Give us this day"...and one for "Forgive us our sins"...and one for "And lead us not"...and...

"One post is all you get!" she said. "Take it or leave it."

(Not really.)

(Jen is much too sweet to respond to my greed like that.)

(She merely thought it.)

Ecstatic, I floated out to the van, where my children sat waiting for me to drive them somewhere. "Guess which word I got?" I crowed. "I'll give you a hint: it's a first person collective pronoun and it's in the second half of the prayer."

My son stared at me. First person collective pronoun? Who talks like that? "Um... 'day'?" he asked.



“Wrong!” My voice was sharp, like a buzzer on a talk show. “And ‘day’ is not a pronoun.”

Hi, everyone, my name is Margaret...and I’m a recovering English teacher. Yes, I can be obnoxious.

Because I am a former English teacher and possess a next-to-fanatical obsession with word choice, this series on the Our Father has been fascinating for me. This little two-letter word “us,” especially, has got me thinking about how often I use the words “I” or “me” rather than “you” or “them” or “us” or “we.”

*Too often!* is the unfortunate answer. I am a very selfish creature.

**And yet in this prayer God is asking that *we* come to Him *collectively*.** Why does He use the word “us” and not “me”? It is because, I believe, Our Lord wants us to stand together spiritually. We are joining our prayers to...*everyone*.

This stands in contrast to the radical individualism that is now so prevalent in our country — an individualism that stems, in part, from the concept of “me and God,” where salvation is seen as basically a private issue between the individual and God. For Catholics, salvation *is not an individual issue*; it’s about “us,” the collective Church Militant. At every Mass, we pray with each

other and for each other, and then — at the end — we are sent forth, just like the Apostles on their initial mission.

*Ite Missa Est.* Go in peace, to love *and* serve.

Isn't that an awesome concept?

**You see, then, that we Christians do not pray the Lord's Prayer merely on own behalf.** We pray that God grant *us* our daily bread, forgive *us* our sins and deliver *us*. In giving us this sacred recitation, Christ makes it clear from the opening to the closing that we are a spiritual family. We are members of the human race, and when we pray we should recognize our place in this family.

Heck, it's not just those of us in the Church Militant either; we have an entire communion of saints to rely on! (St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Margaret Mary...)

(St. Teresa of Avila, St. Isaac Jogues, Blessed Pope John Paul the Great...)

(Don't even get me started on my favorite saints.)

We come before God with our collective need, and we fall on our knees with a collective groan. We need Him, desperately — more than anything or anybody — but we also need to stand together. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that “this

‘us’ recognizes [God] as the Father of all men and we pray to him for them all, in solidarity with their needs and sufferings” (CCC 2829).

We are one body, one body in Christ. I’m humming *We Are One Body* as I type this! (World Youth Day in Denver, 1993. I was there. Were you? If ever I was aware of the mass humanity that is Catholicism, it was at this World Youth Day.)

I’m grateful that Jen gave me the word “us” for this series because it has made me that much more aware of my stubborn individualism and—even worse—my selfish pride. Like a child, I am way too guilty of an “I can do it myself!” attitude—and of a Lucifer-like arrogance that says I don’t need Him and certainly I don’t need you. Yet God continually asks me to *forget* myself (or, at least, move past her) and keeps reminding me (again and again) that there’s strength—*great* strength—in numbers.

It’s thinking “win-win” instead of “I want”...

It’s wanting to all be in heaven forever...

And it’s believing wholeheartedly that we need *us*.

*Margaret Berns is the founder of [Minnesota Mom](#), a popular Catholic lifestyle blog. The wife of one and mom to seven, with another four saints gone before her in miscarriage, Margaret and her (handsome patent attorney) husband live in St. Paul, MN.*

# THIS

By Marc Barnes

**I'm happy to say I got the very best word to reflect on.** I am of the belief that this was due to my good looks and great humility – for it certainly wasn't due to my ability to meet a deadline – but I could be wrong, for Brandon Vogt is one stud of a writer, and he didn't get my marvelous word. Whatever the reason, my word is this: “this.” And the word itself is certainly beautiful; a big, strong, manly affirmative. But in truth, he cannot be separated from his lawfully-wedded object: “day.” This day. Thus, the question we noble dissectors of the Our Father must ask is simple: what does “this” do to “day”?

First, it makes it immediate, present. It is not “give us on Sunday,” or “give us later” or “give us soon” our daily bread, it is give us this day our daily bread, and hurry please. Because God cannot not meet us soon, or later, or on Sunday, only when it is. “This” makes C.S Lewis' statement, that “the Present is the point at which time touches eternity,” something we make sense of

every day. Our prayer confesses that God loves us immediately, in the present moment and as our prayer goes, our lives must follow.

**It is true that the two most important times in the life of a Christian are the present moment and his hour of death,** for all else is speculation and reflection. So when we go through life, let us take this day, seize it, kill it, experience it to the fullest, not only because it's fulfilling, and holy, and the only way towards immense joy, but because we cannot experience anything else!

So often we ask ourselves, faces fixed in some I-have-big-important-plans-and-lots-of-potential grimaces, "What are we to be when we grow up?" And sure, it's a responsible question.

But the truth all Ivy-league life-planners have to wake to and face is this: **You are always only who and when you are. (Feel free to read that twice).** You will never grow up, only continue to be. And if you must ask that horribly responsible question, I demand it be followed up by the infinitely more important and reckless question, "who am I this day?"

For when you die and stand before the throne of judgement, God will not ask for your future plans, He will ask "Who are

you?” He will not endeavor to find out whether you planned on getting to know Him, he will ask whether or not you know Him.

So know Him.

**All this reiterates the fact of conversion and reconciliation, that it is crap to say, “I will start living my faith as soon as I get a handle on this sin, these addictions, this pain, this distrust.” No, God calls us this sinful, broken day.**

Too often we think we have to be perfect to practice this whole religion thing, that our sins and mistakes are the present moment and God is the future. How can we nourish ourselves with the scriptures if we’re also feeding on pornography? How can we engage in our daily prayer if we happen to be selfish jerks? But the strength of “this” bids us — immediately — to push through our own sin and into God’s marvelous light. **There is no disclaimer on the Our Father, no “give us this day, unless we suck, our daily bread.”**

No, we call on God this day, in the very midst of all gone wrong.

Then, “this” makes us arrogant, presumptuous punks. If our Protestant, evangelical culture has done anything for prayer, it has made it polite. So in tune are we with the will of God that our

prayer flows beautifully, gemstones from our tongues, “God if it be your will, please conform my heart to your plan for me, I invite your grace into my life, to have you speak a word into my heart” and so on and thus forth, until the angels weep at the sheer beauty and correctness of our petitions. And there is a place for this prayer. But if there is anything I have against Protestantism, it’s not the church signs, it’s that it has taken all the protest out of religion.

**My Calvinist friend told me, “the problem with you Catholics is that you make God too human,”** and sure, it may be wrong for the Irish to rant and rave at God like he is a judge, to barter with him like he is a merchant, and it may be theologically foolish for me to demand healing for a friend like I am owed it, but surely, surely it is equally wrong to pray like Our Lord is inhuman. Surely, we are made in the image and likeness of God, surely there is a place to — as the psalmist says — cry from the guts. Surely God meant what he said when he told us to be persistent, to knock on the door until the judge gets up, to see Him as our father, to see Christ as our brother, to scream our frustrations to him, to say “give us this day!” like we mean it, like



we demand it, like we will absolutely not leave until we are satisfied.

For “this” does just that. It gives the phrase the impolite air of demand. Give us, right now, your sustenance. There is no please. There is a “this,” an urgency to our request, as if we were a crowd of hungry peasants chanting outside Versailles, “We want bread and we want it now!”

**All this boldness towards God would be blasphemy, were it not requested by Him.**

So what does “this” say about God? It says that he absolutely refuses to be limited. He refuses to become sort of fate, an obscure spirit-being that predestines us from the beginning of time to heaven or hell, and sits while we try to “conform our hearts.” Rather, he is our lover, our savior. We are to speak with him, remind ourselves of his promises, yell “where are you?”, touch him in the Eucharist, taste him on our tongues, let him inform our decisions, guide our ways, invade our dreams. He reaches out from the infinite and batters our hearts in the present moment, in the “This.”

He is, after all, Our Father.

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and he blogs at [BadCatholic](#).*

# DAY

By Jen

**When you think about it, the whole concept of sleep is kind of weird.** If I were God, I would never have come up with that one. All of our communication with God and each other, all the salvation drama of each person's life, plays out only when we're awake.

So what's the point of sleep?

From the divine perspective, why bother adding that feature to the human person? Yeah, there's the evolutionary argument that sleep kept our cave man ancestors from injuring themselves by wandering around at night, and that may have been part of God's thinking, but God didn't have to create night. He could have set up our planet and the solar system in some way that there weren't periods of darkness and therefore we didn't need cycles of rest.

In other words, God could have created a world without the "day," where constant consciousness would render the concept meaningless. Why didn't he?

I think a whole series of posts could be written exploring this one word, pondering the question of why God gives us day and night, wakefulness and sleep. But the answer that seems most clear to me is simply this:

It keeps us intimately close to the concept of death and resurrection.

*Give us this day...*

**Day refers to a finite period of time, one cycle of wakefulness.** At the end of this period I have to stop what I'm doing and let myself fall into unconsciousness. It marks the end of my ability to control the world around me, the death of whatever plans I was in the middle of enacting. And I have no choice: It doesn't matter if I want to sleep or not, if I am certain that it would be best if I went ahead and stayed awake for the next couple of weeks. When the time comes, I must sleep. The day has ended.

Sometimes it's frustrating: The need for sleep often keeps us from accomplishing as much as we'd like to accomplish. It's a constant reminder of our human limits. Like the mini-death that it is, it can be an annoying interruption to our plans. **And yet this**

**mini-death is the only way for us to experience, at a visceral level, the power of a mini-resurrection.**

The end of the day is the only time we ever really hit the “reset” button in life. There are other, artificial milestones like the end of a month or the beginning of a new year, but that important sense of one block of time ending and another beginning is never more powerful than when we wake from unconsciousness and begin a new day. We open our eyes to a resurrection, a new chance, a fresh start. What better way to set the stage for us to understand the work that God’s Son came here to do?

In a 1908 book called *The Secret of a Happy Life*, Fr. Francis Xavier Lasance wrote:

*One secret of a sweet and happy Christian life is learning to live by the day...Life does not come to us all at one time; it comes only a day at a time. Even tomorrow is never ours until it becomes today, and we have nothing whatever to do with it but to pass down to it a fair and good inheritance in today’s work well done, and today’s life well lived.*

*It is a blessed secret this, of living by the day.*

***Any one can carry his burden, however heavy, till nightfall. Anyone can do his work, however heavy, till nightfall. Anyone can***

*do his work, however hard, for one day. Anyone can live sweetly, patiently, lovingly, purely, until the sun goes down. And this is all life ever means to us — just one little day. “Do today’s duty; fight today’s temptations, and do not weaken or distract yourself by looking forward to things you cannot see and could not understand if you saw them.” God gives us nights to shut down upon our little days. We cannot see beyond. Short horizons make life easier and give us one of the blessed secrets of brave, true, holy living.*

There is so much wisdom contained in those few sentences; it’s one of my favorite quotes of all time. And I think it’s the perfect explanation for why God gave us the day.

# DAILY

By Kate Wicker

**Every morning my daughters traipse into the kitchen** to eagerly check the plastic habitat where several spiky caterpillars are slowly milling around and grazing upon whatever it is that caterpillars eat. (Our home kit came with all the sustenance they would need.)

When we received the little guys in the mail, the directions said we should expect the caterpillars to get bigger every day until they finally make their way to the top of their plastic accommodations, shape themselves into tiny letter “Js,” and then curl up and harden into chrysalids where the real transformation will take place in secret – hidden from my children’s curious eyes.

At first, I worried those unmoving little things weren’t changing at all and were going to die on us. All I noticed was the alarming ratio of caterpillar frass (a.k.a. poop) to caterpillars. I saw more waste than potential for new life and feared my

children's dreams of butterflies bursting forth from their chrysalises in an effusion of light would soon be shattered.

It didn't help that a childhood memory of my own haunted me. When I was in second grade, my class was learning about growth and change and kept a glass jar in our classroom that housed a chrysalis. Every morning I waited for a beautiful creature to emerge from the tiny bundle that delicately dangled from its tapered twig. I scribbled a promising portrait of the winged beauty I expected to see in a couple of weeks, but, sadly, that was the only butterfly that ever manifested from the whole experience. The chrysalis eventually dried up into a lifeless lump and tumbled down to the jar bottom.

Fortunately, my 6-year-old is not nearly as jaded as I am and has never had anything but hope for the caterpillars. So every morning and sometimes several times a day she comments on how much bigger the caterpillars are getting.

As for me, it's taken about 10 days to pass for me to notice a real difference in their size. They are indeed fat now and even moving to the top, assuming their positions and J-shapes. The cumulative change caught my eye, but I missed the incremental changes, the daily transformation.



**Which leads me to wonder: Is my child's observation real – her youthful eyes more keen than my own?** Or is it the simple belief that the larvae should be getting be bigger with each passing day that allows her to notice the smallest of change?

Just as seeing the insect's big changes is easy enough for me so, too, is the beginning of our Lord's Prayer. We invoke God as our Father. We praise Him. We bless Him.

Then we start asking Him for stuff. This is where it gets a little more tricky for me.

Petitionary prayer might be a popular form of prayer, but it's also the type of prayer that personally tests me – someone who struggles with her share of cynicism and who seemed to have lost a big chunk of her childlike trust the day that chrysalis dried up. Of course God's name is hallowed. He's God for goodness' sake, but does that really mean He's going to give me all that I need right now at this very moment? **He might be holy, but what can He really do for me?**

Ask me these same questions when I have the gift of hindsight, and I'll realize He was showering me with graces during the good times in my life – and the bad. That time the boy I thought was the one ripped out my heart and ate it (or something melodramatic

like that)? Devastation when it happened. Pure thanksgiving now for the husband and children I have. Growing up with a sibling who was an addict? It meant my candy-coated childhood was sometimes made bitter. But it also gave me a whole lot of insight now that I'm a parent and am realizing my children don't belong to me and have free wills of their own. Let go. Let God. He was teaching me these lessons during the tough moments in my life. He was giving me enough hope to get by and to cling to faith. There was no manna raining down from heaven, but God was nourishing me daily. He was giving me Him. That's easy to see now, but it was more difficult back then.

**It's like when I'm observing those caterpillars, I might see the big changes,** but I'm too often impervious to the daily graces and provisions God blesses me with that are changing me and shaping me from moment to moment.

Maybe this helps explain why asking for daily bread – not just a big loaf at the end of life or even just the sustenance I receive when I celebrate the Eucharist and eat the bread that is Him – is challenging for me.

My children, who live a fairly charmed life, don't have much of a need for petitionary prayer. They believe the caterpillars will

grow and turn into butterflies because that's what is supposed to happen. Mom will serve them breakfast because that's what she does every morning. God is good. God is love. Ergo, He will give them all that they need today. No need to worry about tomorrow. His daily provision is enough. It's as simple as that.

As the Catechism explains, “[Daily] is a pedagogical repetition of ‘this day’ to confirm us in trust ‘without reservation’” (2837).

Earlier the Catechism says, “The trust of children who look to their Father for everything is beautiful. ‘He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.’ He gives to all the living ‘their food in due season.’ Jesus teaches us this petition, because it glorifies our Father by acknowledging how good he is, beyond all goodness” (2828).

Now the Catechism does go on to point out that the word “daily” means a lot of other things, too. It's not just about satisfying our bodily hunger but is related directly to the Bread of Life. It reminds us that the Eucharist is not only a foretaste of the kingdom to come but something to be celebrated daily, if possible. **Yet, for me the most poignant meaning of the word is the filial trust it demands** – to keep asking and believing every single day even when our human eyes don't see the

transformation, the answered prayers, the changes, the gifts of bread.

Rote prayers are meant to speak to our personal souls, and this is really what the word “daily” seems to be asking of me: To believe in the grace of God. To believe He will sustain all of us and give us all that we need on a daily basis – not just at the end of time, not just at the Eucharistic banquet. To trust that just as I fill my children’s cups every day, God will fill me up, too.

**Yet, “daily” reminds me, too, that I must not live as if I have no taste** for His daily bread and think that I have everything I need and don’t need to depend on God. And if I don’t feel like my needs are being met, I must resist the temptation in assuming it’s my fault (or someone else’s) and/or that I can fix it all on my own.

“Daily” asks me to place a childlike confidence in God that He will make up for both my temporal and spiritual insufficiencies.

Finally, it invites me to believe – just as my children believe in the power of metamorphosis – not only in the gift of daily manna but in my own day-after-day transformation, in my becoming, slowly, slowly more like Him.

*Kate Wicker is a wife, mom of four, speaker, and the author of [Weightless: Making Peace with Your Body](#). She is currently working on a book about embracing imperfect motherhood (Ave Maria Press, 2017). Next up: Finally finishing her perennially "almost finished" novel. To learn more about her speaking, writing, and life, please visit [KateWicker.com](http://KateWicker.com).*

# BREAD

By Jen

When I come across this word in the Our Father, I am immediately struck by its simplicity. We ask God for only one concrete thing in the entire prayer, and it is simply bread. Not a feast, not a meal, not even a sandwich. Just bread.

This is an important insight for me, since I am someone who tends to have a very complicated prayer life.

I am a control freak who overthinks everything, so by the time I finally get around to praying about the various messes I get myself into, my requests are both legalistic and convoluted. I develop elaborate visions of what I need God to give me in order to have everything run perfectly, and the result is a jumbled mess of words that confuses even me.

I tend to think that my happiness will come in the details of my requests being fulfilled. Everything will be wonderful forever if God can just get my car fixed, get that bill paid, get me that job offer, and get me out of that one really long mandatory parent meeting.

Yet what does Jesus tell us to ask for? Bread. And not even a reliable delivery plan for that bread — only what we need for today.

My overly analytical mind recoils at such a plain request. “But what about?!...” I begin. And then I remember: We really don’t need as much as we think we need.

# FORGIVE

By Jeff Miller

**In the Pater Noster\* (Our Father) there are two instances of the use of the word forgive.** The first instance which I am dealing with is our supplication to God for forgiveness. While the Pater Noster is theologically loaded with meaning, forgiveness really gets down to the nitty gritty of salvation. To answer the question of why he converted to Catholicism, G.K. Chesterton wrote simply:

“To get rid of my sins.”

Our whole need for a redeemer is based on the fact that we have sinned against God and need his forgiveness. One of the main thrusts of the modern world is to deprecate sin and to separate the connection between our actions and God. There is talk of secret sins or sins that hurt no one but the person committing them or to wipe them away if done by consenting adults. Break the connection as a sin being an offense to God and soon you break



the connection that something is a sin at all; and then there is no need to seek forgiveness from anyone, much less God.

As an atheist for most of my life and as someone who never believed in God from childhood on, I would not admit of such a charged word as sin. Faults, failings, quirks, and certainly areas in need of improvement just to make my own life better certainly, but not sins. I felt no need for any kind of forgiveness, while as a wannabe stoic wanting to improve on my “faults and quirks” hoping to do better next time or at least not get caught at something. It was annoying, though, that things that were called sins by traditional Christian morality carried Natural Law consequences to them, and my calling them a fault instead of a sin did not reduce those consequences. How could I look for forgiveness for my failing since really my failings were just culturally conditioned standards that I had grown up with? It is often quoted that Satan’s greatest trick was to get people to believe he didn’t exist. Actually, the greatest trick is first to deny sin, and soon the existence of Satan along with the need for redemption is simply wiped out in the minds of people.

Sin, as St. Augustine wrote, is “a word, deed or desire in opposition to the eternal law.” More to the point, sin is an affront

to the Persons of the Holy Trinity. On the natural level when we repent of some action and ask for forgiveness from those we have wronged, there is often some level of healing involved in this.

Yet when we leave God out of this equation we are still left with something seemingly undigested that stays with us.

**The denial of God does not eliminate that need for forgiveness from whom we have truly sinned against.** To resort to St. Augustine again, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” That restlessness is a result of our damaged relationship with God and it is only when we repent and receive God’s forgiveness that that restlessness can be quieted.

Luckily for us, sins we have truly repented of can and will be forgiven by God. God the Father so loves us that he sent his son Jesus to physically die for our sins and that forgiveness comes from Christ’s finished work on Calvary.

**Look upon the cross and then say your sin doesn’t hurt anybody.** God could have chosen one of many ways to forgive us of our sins. Yet the way he chose not only shows us the seriousness of our sins, but also of God’s unfathomably great love for us. Jesus’ healings in the Gospel were not merely medical miracles but were performed in connection with the forgiveness

of sin. Jesus prefaced these actions by saying “Your sins are forgiven.” Really, there are hardly more wonderful words than to hear that your sins have been forgiven. Walk out of a psychiatrist's office and your wallet might be a little lighter and maybe you have some better insights into your actions, but your sins remain.

It is one thing though to know that God can forgive sins and another to know that he has forgiven our sins. God gave us the Church to help us realize his mercy and forgiveness. The sacrament of Baptism cleanses us of all sin as we are reborn and brought into the Body of Christ. It has often given me great joy to watch older adult members coming into the Church and being baptized and knowing that they walk away as sinless as a newborn babe.

We can of course cry to God directly to forgive us of a sin just as we do in this petition of the Pater Noster. If we have perfect contrition, sorrow for sin arising from perfect love, we are fully forgiven. Often, though, we can fool ourselves as to seriousness of our sin or even sometimes to exaggerate a fault into a more serious sin. To help with this, God has extended his forgiveness via the Priesthood. “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they

are retained” (John 20:21–23). “The Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (Matt. 9:6), and then Jesus said he “had given such authority to men” (Matt. 9:8).

In the Sacrament of Confession, when we confess our sins and have repented of them we will hear the words of absolution — “I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The priest, as in the Mass, is acting In Persona Christ (In the Person of Christ) and we can be confident that if given absolution our petition to “forgive us our trespasses” has been answered. We should both ask God directly for forgiveness as soon as we have repented and then go to confession and even with perfect contrition we must go to confession upon our first opportunity.

**I left behind my atheism and became Catholic “to get rid of my sins”** as G.K. Chesterton said, and to in fact continue “to get rid of my sins” since this is not a one time action but a continuous response in the life of grace on the path to growing in holiness. I watered the flood of the confessional with my tears as I recounted my many sins in my first confession and walked out for the first time really knowing what God’s forgiveness meant.

*\* As a traditionally minded convert I like to pepper my writing with Latin phrases from my extremely limited vocabulary of Latin phrases.*

*Jeff Miller is a former atheist who after spending forty years in the wilderness finds himself with both astonishment and joy a member of the Catholic Church. He writes at [The Curt Jester](#).*

# US

By Eric Sammons

**When Jesus first teaches his followers to pray, he makes one thing abundantly clear:** we must do it “in secret,” so we are not like the “hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men.” (Matthew 6:5). Yet immediately after this warning, Jesus gives us the model for prayer — the Our Father — and, curiously, all the pronouns in this prayer are first person plural: “*Our* Father,” “give *us*,” “forgive *us*.”

If we are to pray in secret, then why is our model for prayer clearly intended to be said with others?

**Simply put, our prayer is never to be *for* others to see, but is always to be *with* others.** Even when we pray in secret, we are united to the whole Body of Christ: There is no “I” or “me” in the Christian faith; it is always “us” who pray, who serve, who worship, and who are forgiven. This is something that our radically individualistic society chafes at. Our American culture

especially exalts the lone ranger, the one who pulls himself up by his own bootstraps. Yet Christianity teaches the opposite: We are created for others — it is not good for man to be alone (cf. Genesis 2:18).

We encounter this reality of “us” in the very first pages of Sacred Scripture. God declares at the beginning of time, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26), and then the sacred author tells us, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). We are not created alone, and in fact, we are made in the image of the divine “Us” of the Holy Trinity.

Sartre famously declared that “Hell is other people,” but in fact that opposite is true: Hell is being totally, utterly alone. Love requires more than one person, and so the aloneness of Hell is “the suffering of being no longer able to love” as Elder Zosima cries out in *The Brothers Karamozov*.

**The opposite of love is not hate, it is selfishness.** For when we love, we direct our energies away from ourselves and to others — to God first and then to our neighbor. Love acknowledges that we are part of the “us” created by the divine “Us” of the

Trinitarian God. Let us always remember that the quest for holiness is never a solitary affair, but one we take up with our brothers and sisters as we seek to model ourselves after the God who pours Himself out for us for all eternity.

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# TRESPASSES

By Jen

**Have you ever been in debt?** Like big, looming, debt that makes you feel suffocated and trapped? I have. And I think of that experience every time I read this word of the Our Father.

Many versions of the Bible use the word *debts* instead of *trespasses* here, and when I pray the Our Father I sometimes substitute that word. For one thing, it helps me avoid falling into rote recitation to use a different term than I'm used to. But the biggest reason is that I have a visceral reaction to the word *debt*.

Shortly after we were married, my husband and I started a business. It involved taking on some debt, as starting a business often does, and we were confident that we'd quickly pay it off. But then a perfect storm of events came together to throw everything off course, and our debt started piling up faster than we could pay it off. Eventually it all worked out, but for a while there **I knew the sinking feeling of walking around under the weight of debt.**

So when I pray this word in the Our Father, it strikes me just what a bold statement Jesus allows us to make here. *Forgive us our debts*. Really? We can be so bold as to just ask for this? Imagine calling up someone whom you owed a large amount of money and asking him to forget about it. It would be humbling, maybe even terrifying. Your fingers would shake as you dialed the phone. Your heart would race as you considered that you were about to ask for something utterly undeserved. Our debt to God is deeper and infinitely larger than any sum of money, and yet this is exactly what we do each time we pray the Our Father!

**I'm spiritually immature enough that I have a stronger gut reaction to concrete concepts like money** than to spiritual concepts like sin, so, even though it's not a perfect analogy, remembering the roller coaster of emotions that came with being in debt helps me wrap my mind around this part of the Our Father. Reliving that burdened, heavy feeling that came with owing a lot of money helps me *feel* the consequences of my sins. And then I recall how it felt when the last of the debt was finally gone, that overwhelming relief and explosive joy that was like being a prisoner set free from a dungeon. It's a cliché, but it really felt like the first day of the rest of my life.

It's stunning to consider that God offers this same thing to us every day, for a debt incomprehensibly larger. Only, unlike financial debt, there's no interest, no forms to fill out, no checks to write. There's only one condition to this gift, and it's incredibly simple: that we be willing to do the same for those who are in debt to us. As long as we are willing to do that one thing, the freedom and exhilaration of having all our debts forgiven is available to us at any time, and all we have to do is ask.

# AS

By Anna Macdonald

**This idea has been bothering me lately**, that God will forgive us **as** we forgive others. This theme doesn't just show up in the Our Father. It also shows up in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:23), in Mark 11:25, and in Luke 6:37. Jesus is pretty clear on this. We'd better forgive others, **or else**.

Or else we won't be forgiven.

And that's a pretty serious thing. Some months ago, I realized that there were a couple of very small grudges that I had been holding on to for years, without paying much attention to them or being particularly aware that that was what I was doing. I repented, let go of the grudges, and confessed it at my next confession.

Suddenly that phrase "forgive us as we forgive others" had a very personal meaning. Had God not been forgiving me completely, because I had not forgiven others completely? Isn't that what "as" means – that however much I forgive others is how

much God is forgiving me? I had been holding a grudge against someone, so God was holding a grudge against me? But God doesn't hold grudges. **Jesus forgave those who *killed him*; how could a little unforgiveness be difficult to forgive compared to that?**

I decided to reread the parable of the unforgiving servant in an attempt to resolve this dilemma. Although I knew the parable well, I hoped for some piece of insight somewhere\*. So I started off, getting right into "A king decided to settle the accounts of his servants."

And that was as far as I got.

Because, to me, "settling accounts" is like a giant codeword for "Last Judgement." You know, the one where everything that is hidden comes to light, and all accounts are settled, once and for all. Paid in Full. Suddenly the perspective on the whole parable was shifted. Instead of my own little grudges that I had let go of, I pictured someone at the Last Judgement, still refusing to forgive their brother. I mean, really, what's God supposed to do in that situation? Say, "Sure, you can enter heaven, even though you hate your brother who is also here"? No, no I don't think so. It's the *Last Judgment*. There's no more later opportunities to repent and

forgive your brother. If you still can't then, you're stuck hating him for all eternity.

So I saw something then. It's not that unforgiveness is a worse sin than other sins, or that God can't forgive it. But, like all sins, even if God isn't holding a grudge against us while we do them, **he can't forgive us in any meaningful way until we *stop sinning***. And in the case of unforgiveness, the only way to stop sinning is to forgive.

I saw that I had been thinking of that “forgive us **as** we forgive others,” as if God was sitting there with some little “forgiveness-measuring device,” so that however much forgiveness we doled out to others, that was how much forgiveness He gave us, with nano-absolve precision. No wonder it violated my idea of an unstintingly loving God. Now when I say “forgive us as we forgive others”, I think of the “as” as meaning “when” or “as soon as.”\*\* This draws out the picture of a God who is eagerly waiting for us to forgive others, so that he in turn can offer us his full forgiveness.

*\* It was actually an interesting moment for me. I sat there with the Bible in my lap, opened to the parable, about to read it. But then I had this strong thought that it was a complete waste of time*

*for me to even try to read it, because I already knew the parable and wasn't going to gain any new insights out of it. I was so sure of that, I almost closed the Bible. When I did actually start reading and immediately had my insight, I knew for sure that prior thought had been a temptation from the Enemy.*

*\*\* Both the English “as” and the Greek “os” of the Bible (which is translated into “as”) can mean either “according as” or “when.”*

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# WE FORGIVE

By Heather King

**As we FORGIVE those who trespass against us...**

We tend to think that God's will is out of our hands. We tend to resist abandoning ourselves completely out of fear. But to be forgiven *as we forgive* beautifully leaves the control in our hands. Maybe we can't forgive. But the choice at least to pray for the willingness to forgive is ours.

Forgiveness goes so against our natural sense of justice that it often seems beyond our reach: "Then Peter came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?'" Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.'" (Matthew 18: 21-22)

**To forgive, however, is not to be a doormat.** A doormat says, "That you hurt me is okay." The martyr says, "I'm in agony that you hurt me, I'm in sorrow for you and the world, but I'm not going to return violence for violence."



Just as Christ blew apart for all time the old “law” of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, he also blew apart all notion of counting the cost, hedging our bets, playing things close to the vest. To forgive is not to let someone off the hook—this time. To forgive is not to be outwardly “nice” and inside to plot vengeance. **To forgive is to open our arms and heart wide, to remain woundable—as Christ did on the Cross.**

What’s important, in other words, isn’t the quantity or extent to which we forgive, but the orientation of heart, the quality, the way in which we forgive. Because in remaining woundable, we don’t just get an *equal* return: we get more, and of an entirely different order, than we ever could have imagined.

When we stop counting the cost, the universe stops counting the cost toward us. When our hearts overflow toward others, the heart of Christ overflows toward us. The very letting go of our calculating and scheming and fear—not winning; not acting as judge, jury, and executioner—turns out to be what we’ve wanted all along.

“Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned, forgive and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken

together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back.” (Luke 6: 37-38)

In *Everything Belongs*, Richard Rohr writes: “I believe with all my heart that the Gospel is all about the mystery of forgiveness. When you ‘get’ forgiveness, you get it. **We use the phrase ‘falling in love.’ I think forgiveness is almost the same thing.** It’s a mystery we fall into: the mystery is God.”

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# THOSE

By Jen

***Those.*** The word isn't too exciting in and of itself, but the concept it encapsulates brings up an explosion of emotion: The people who have hurt us.

When I first started praying the Our Father, I always had an uppity little feeling rise within me at this part. "...Those who have trespassed against us."

Ah, yes, *those* people. The jerks. The idiots. The inconsiderate. In other words, the bad people.

Yeah, yeah, I might have done some stuff wrong too, hence the asking God to forgive me *my* trespasses part, but it was nothing like what the people did who wronged me. When I would scan my memory for the faces of people who did something harmful enough that I still carried lingering resentment, I was seeing the faces of a different type of people than I was — because, after all, I was one of the good people.

**Then one day I came across some black-and-white pictures** of lovely folks who looked much like me and my friends. They were having a party, and it looked like a great time. The ladies were dressed beautifully, the handsome men photographed in mid-laugh. A guy joked around with an accordion for entertainment. Within me there was a split second of recognition, the fleeting thought that *these people are just like me!*

And then I realized that I was looking at photos of Nazis. It was an on-site staff retreat at Auschwitz.

I came to the stunning realization that no sane person ever thinks that he's a "bad person." The men and women in these photos had obviously rationalized the work that they did to the point that they convinced themselves that they were actually doing something important. After considering it further, I came to see that **evil always works through lies**: The only way any of us ever does bad things is by concocting stories to explain to ourselves why our actions are actually good.

And thus, the only difference between being a good person and a bad person is the number of lies you allow yourself to believe.

Suddenly, I wasn't so smug at this part of the Lord's Prayer anymore. I began to see that I had rationalized away my own bad

behavior countless times over the years. And whenever I prayed the words about “those who have trespassed against us,” I was struck with the humbling knowledge that **I was one of the “those” in someone else’s prayer.**

# WHO HAVE TRESPASSED

By Elizabeth Scalia

*“Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us...”*

**Looking back over our lives. most of us recall moments that make us wince** — memories we’d rather keep buried are often bound up in those moments when we have been trespassed against. In fact, the times we have been sinned against are seared so deeply within us that they don’t even require an access of memory to bring them forth; we wear them in our flesh or display them in our guardedness or our sarcasms, or our protective narcissism.

If what is well-fortified within us can rarely be breached, it follows that a trespassing is an invasion at our most insecure and vulnerable point. And because those vulnerabilities are not always obvious, others may not even know the depths to which they have trespassed against us. **A tossed-off, jeering remark that may bounce off of one friend might wholly undo another.**

Our hurt may not always be obvious to others, but we know in our within ourselves when we have been trespassed against.

Realizing this, you'd suppose our instincts would be toward *mindfulness*, that we would take care not to purposely or knowingly romp through another's tender garden, or brusquely invade their sensibilities. Having ourselves been psychologically or spiritually, or even physically plundered, we like to think that we are more sensitive toward others; if we are really deluded, we enjoy a conceit that we actually treat others as we would have them treat us. When we are a bit more honest, though, we acknowledge our ability to create havoc in the lives of others. We know that we trespass against others — going where we ought not — all the time.

We know that yes, everyone has sore spots, slow-healing or chronic wounds they carry with them like awkward packages, and yet our mindlessness abounds. Despite our best intentions, our daily resolves to do better, strike out less, *make ourselves behave*, we fail. Sometimes — and then spectacularly — it's because we are caught up in the stress of a moment, but too frequently, we parry forward pointedly, with an intention to nick another.

And intentions matter. Intentions are why we require acts of mercy and forgiveness, both from God and each other.

**With our “best” intentions, though we demonstrate that we are truly the children of Eve.** Perhaps our earliest ancestor really was a victim of effective marketing and simply bought into the notion that she should “know more” and “be more” but in her actions she brought about the world’s first excuse-making, “wow, I didn’t really mean for *that* to happen” trespass. And as hers was a trespass against Almighty God, it was a whopper; her excuse, well...God understood her intention, even if she did not.

If Eve’s trespassing was humanity’s first, we know none of us will have our last until we pass from this world and into — if God is merciful — a glorious one.

And we know God is merciful. In the face of a lesser god, Eve’s transgression — her trespass — might have cost her (and us) life, itself. Instead, it cost a sacrifice of God’s own, one that created a path — a way for us to journey back to him. Our forgiving God allows us to stumble and fumble and misstep on our return, asking only that we stay on the narrow but sacramental and holy path, in faith.



His applied mercy allows us, with every confession, to reset and recalibrate before we firmly resolve “with the help of thy grace” to step out anew, and keep to the path. It teaches us that we cannot “make ourselves behave” without grace, and that we will progress no further toward that glory we seek until we too learn to apply mercy upon others.

There is mystery in this, of course. **Our God is a God of Paradoxes, and the paradox of applied mercy makes what seems weak to be immensely strong** — strong enough to overpower the marauders of our memory, and the invasions of our own worst intentions.

When we fail in that mercy, however, we trespass against the other, and against God, and against ourselves.

That last might be the most heinous trespass, if we allow it to defeat us, and so we must not. Let us therefore make haste, ever-more-frequently, toward the one threshold over which we are never trespassing, the confessional, in order to learn applied mercy at the feet of the Master. When we have learned to apply it, as armor, we will be so changed that to be trespassed against will cause no lasting injury. And to ourselves trespass another will seem like too heavy a task, for heaven.

*Elizabeth Scalia is a Benedictine Oblate, and the Editor-in-Chief Aleteia's English edition. Her book Little Sins Mean a Lot: Kicking Our Bad Habits Before They Kick Us is out now.*

# AGAINST

By Jen

**“But what if someone *wants* you to kill them and eat them?”**  
my friend asked.

My husband and I were at a dinner party shortly after we got married, when I was still an atheist. Someone brought up a recent news story about a man in Europe who had been killing and then eating other men. What turned the subject into a debate was that he met these guys in some kind of “Kill Me and Eat Me” internet forum, so the victims opted in to the whole thing. Because of this, most of my friends at the party declared that the killer had committed no crime.

“I think it’s fine,” a friend’s husband announced. “In a way, the guy’s a hero. These other dudes wanted to be killed and eaten, and this guy was the only one who would do it.”

After doing a reality check to make sure I wasn’t dreaming, I began laying out the case that the man was not a hero. After a few more back-and-forths, I grudgingly admitted that my friends’ case

was not totally unreasonable. I mean, the victims *had* signed up for it — he even let people go who changed their minds in the beginning steps of the macabre process. **But something within me screamed that this was wrong in the most dire sense of the word.**

“Yeah, you’re right, it does *feel* wrong,” the gal across from me said as she sipped merlot. “At first I had the same reaction you did: It’s a deplorable crime against humanity. But then I thought it through, and realized that it was fine.”

Ultimately, they said, what’s right and wrong is up for individual people to figure out for themselves.

It was one of my first lessons that reason can convince you of stuff that’s stupid and wrong. It also primed me to be receptive to the idea of the Natural Law, which I would read about a few years later when I began exploring religion. I came across C.S. Lewis’ magnificent book *Mere Christianity*, where he makes the case that the truth about right and wrong is written on every human heart. To those who would say that morality varies widely by time and place, he responded:

*But this is not true. There have been differences between their moralities, but these have never amounted to anything like a total*

*difference. If anyone will take the trouble to compare the moral teaching of, say, the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Hindus, Chinese, Greeks and Romans, what will really strike him will be how very like they are to each other and to our own...Think of a country where people were admired for running away in battle, or where a man felt proud of double-crossing all the people who had been kindest to him...Men have differed as regards what people you ought to be unselfish to — whether it was your own family, or your fellow countrymen, or everyone. But they have always agreed that you ought not to put yourself first.*

**This is what I think of when I hear the word *against* in the Our Father.** It's popular these days to scoff at the notion that objective Right and Wrong exists, to pretend that we have no notion of such a thing. It is usually only when someone goes *against* it that we suddenly realize that the Natural Law exists, and that it's a horrible thing when someone violates it.

And the more personal the situation, the more we realize it.

Borrowing my friends' reasoning that there is no such thing as true right and true wrong, I could have announced at the dinner party that my personal philosophy was that "survival of the

fittest” is the highest aim of humanity. I may have even gotten some folks to agree that it was a valid, reasonable view.

**But when I started grabbing the hosts’ belongings and putting them into my trunk**, challenging them to a contest of strength to determine who gets to keep the TV and the laptop, I think they would have pretty quickly said that I was wrong — not wrong because their personal, subjective opinions happened to contradict my actions, but wrong because what I was doing was objectively, unconditionally *wrong*.

C.S. Lewis continues:

*Whenever you find a man who says he does not believe in a real Right and Wrong, you will find the same man going back on this a moment later. He may break his promise to you, but if you try breaking one to him he will be complaining “It’s not fair” before you can say Jack Robinson. A nation may say treaties don’t matter; but then, the next minute, they spoil their case by saying that the particular treaty they broke was an unfair one. But if treatises do not matter, and if there is no such thing as Right and Wrong — in other words, if there is no Law of Nature — what is the difference between a fair treaty and an unfair one? Have they*

*not let the cat out of the bag and shown that, whatever they say, they really know the Law of Nature just like anyone else?*

**It's easy to quibble with the idea of Natural Law when it's all theoretical.** But we feel the truth of it on a visceral level when someone goes against it — when they trespass across the boundary of right and wrong — especially if they have done so in a way that impacts our own lives. Rarely are we more in tune with God's truth about what is truly good, with the beautiful code of conduct that is inscribed on every human heart, than when someone has trespassed against us.

# LEAD

By Sally Thomas

***Lead us not into temptation?*** For years this has struck me as a **strange request** to make of God, in the prayer at the heart of all our prayer.

Syntactically speaking, in English at any rate, we ask God to lead us, even as we ask him not to lead us *there*. I don't know how the jazzier modern translations have it, but to me it seems important that our petition doesn't begin with *don't*. To say *lead us not*, we first have to say *lead us*. Our *yes* ends in a *no*; our *no* begins with a *yes*. In the very language, as it's rendered in the most familiar English formulation, the gears crunch, the machinery seems to stall a little. *Lead us — we can't lead ourselves — but wait a minute. Not that.*

Am I alone in finding this at least momentarily disorienting?

Why does Jesus exhort the disciples, and us, to pray this way? Well, for one thing, it occurs to me that He speaks from personal experience. The Gospel narrative is structured so that the Our



Father reverberates with echoes of earlier events. If ever there were anyone *led* by God, it's God Himself. As St. Matthew tells us, *Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*

**He isn't merely allowed to go up into the desert; He isn't sent, or ordered, or instructed, or advised.** He is led there, as a good dog is led on a leash, as a sheep is led by the bellwether's bell, as the children of Israel were led by the pillar of fire. Like His own people, submitting Himself to walk in their way, God goes to the desert following God.

He goes, as we know, to be tempted. The Gospel narratives fast-forward through those forty long days of fasting and prayer to arrive at the entrance of the devil — *stage left* — come to speak his lines and make his empty offers. Of course, this trial, like our prayer, turns on a paradox. Fully human, Jesus has put on our own susceptibility to temptation. At the same time, whatever the devil considers Jesus to lack — food, faith, power — He supplies Himself, being Himself the inexhaustible supply.

Manifestly God does *lead*, and go Himself, into temptation. Still, a question niggles at my mind. If God did take us deliberately to the edge of our capacity to resist, and I'm not

saying that He doesn't, this would be nowhere that He hadn't been before, nowhere that He would not revisit with us, nowhere that His grace would not be sufficient. Every time we pray, we say *lead us. Yet we're unwilling, and on Jesus' orders, to take the desert road.*

Why?

Possibly the same thought strikes the disciples. We presume that they know the story of the desert; after all, someone had to hand it down to us. We might presume as well that, having just cast down their nets and leapt up from their tax records, they are as eager as any new recruits to hurl themselves into the fray. Like the short guy on the varsity football squad, they might well be pacing up and down the sidelines saying, *Put me in, coach! Put me in! Let me show you what I can do! Bring it on!* Yet Jesus' prayer primer seems to suggest that this is precisely the attitude not to have.

An explanation obvious to us — well, it should be obvious to us — is as yet unavailable to them: that they, and we, aren't God. Or to put it another way, that He is. The disciples simply don't know this, not fully or with the implications made clear. If they're willing to go wherever Jesus leads, it's in ignorance: of who He

is, of who they are beside Him. They have no idea where His road really leads. So two of them can walk along arguing over who gets to sit next to Him; when He asks them whether they can drink the cup prepared for Him, naively they answer that they can. When their attempts at casting out demons fail, they're bewildered. *What's wrong? It worked for that guy. Why isn't it working for us?*

From the disciples' perspective, as from ours, the journey looks like a series of stops, any one of which could be a destination: a healing here, a demon-ectomy there, a raising from the dead. *Are we there yet? This is all pretty exciting. You mean there's more?* A stumble, a quarrel, a denial.

The exhortation to beg God to lead us, but not into temptation, is a double-whammy reminder of our frailty and our capacity for presumption. **Even as we acknowledge our need to be led, we also confess our unfitness for the road.** To ask God to *lead* us into trial, as we might be — ha ha! — *tempted* to do, to prove our love and our worth, would be tantamount to taking that first step off the pinnacle of the Temple, trusting the hair-trigger reflexes of the angels and, worse, our own imperviousness to the laws of metaphysical gravity. *Don't ask to go there, guys, Jesus*

effectively warns the disciples. *Because the minute you do, you're following somebody else, not Me.*

The way is straight, but it often doesn't seem so. It takes us past alluring exits, tantalizing detours, the adult superstores and factory outlet malls of the soul. Paradoxically again, though we've boarded the bus with the all-sufficient driver, He makes it clear that all the options are ours. Though we've surrendered ourselves into His hands, having confessed that we're in no shape to drive ourselves, still He gives us some say in the itinerary – as long as we understand that to get where we're going, we must always tell the driver, *Not that exit. Don't turn here. Ignore the detour. Keep going.*

Ultimately Jesus reminds us that our song, always, is this:

Lead me, Lord. Lead me in Thy righteousness.

Make Thy way plain before my face.

For it is Thou, Lord, Thou Lord only

Who makest me dwell in safety.

Lead me, Lord. Lead me not. Lead me.

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# NOT

By Martina Kreitzer

**Rules. Who needs them anyway, right?** As adults, we have the freedom to say “yes” or “no” because “Rules? We don’t need no stinkin’ rules!” It’s the ongoing battle of the intellect vs. the will. We know subconsciously {or maybe a simple reminder of looking down at our gut} that we shouldn’t have the #1 Extra Value Meal, super size the fries and sweet tea. Our intellect is wise to our antics, but the will? Oh, how the will breaks us in half and tempts us, using its best tactics to get the intellect to acquiesce so our gut is satisfied.

But is our gut truly satisfied?

The bigger question is, how does our free will stack up when faced with temptation? Because of God’s grace infused into our soul at baptism and stirred when we are confirmed, we are assured that we can do all things with Him. **Through the use of our God given free will, everything we do is subject not just to temptation, but more importantly our reaction to that**

**temptation.** Where Satan tempted Christ, it could not be done. Where Satan tempts us, we either succumb or we stand strong with the help of God's graces.

Everywhere we look in our secular culture, the word "no" is seen as a negative, a moral relativist's worst nightmare.

"How dare we tell ourselves no! We are our own judge and jury, free to do as we please with responsibility to none."

And yet, by saying "yes" to the world, we become slaves to the consequences of that instant gratification, the temporal pleasures that ultimately do not measure up to the infinite goodness we will experience in heaven with God.

So when we turn our attention to this beautiful phrase of asking God to "lead us not into temptation..." it begs much more thought than our finite minds can comprehend.

Where we see "not" as a negative, gloom and doom, or a pessimistic way of responding to something, **we are given hope and a glimpse at how our view of "not" is actually God's way of telling us "yes."**

How so?

I remember once when my mother-in-law explained the Teachings of the Church in a very simple way. I appreciated the

simplicity of it because, well, my brain is very simple. She talked about the “rules” of the Church as the boundary. Her visual included the grandkids’ trampoline outside that has the mesh netting around the edge to keep the kids from flying sideways, 40 feet away.

“Okay,” I’m thinking to myself, “what does this have to do with the Church?” She then goes on to explain to me that the rules serve the same purpose as the mesh netting. They are there to keep us safe. As long as we know where the boundaries are and more importantly, we understand why they exist, we can have all kinds of fun bouncing around like crazy people in the middle. I often joke that some who are more rigid in their faith {I say that genuinely and lovingly} are probably the ones jumping straight up and down right in the middle. You can guess who’s hanging off the netting, though, right? Yup, the charismatics. God love ‘em.

**I had to admit her visual was very intriguing to me.** It’s actually one of my favorite analogies when I share the purpose of the rules of the Church with friends and strangers who get too close to me and my Catholic rubs off on them. I think what speaks to me most about it is the fact that while it can look enticing



beyond the mesh netting/rules of our Faith, we can be assured that God puts those rules in place to protect us. Much like we, as parents, employ rules for the ultimate benefit of our children, so God does to demonstrate that love for us.

Within the body of the prayer, we can look at “lead us not into temptation...” not through the filter of our finite minds, but rather see how we are ultimately dependent on God, as His children, to blockade the temptation that seeks us at every turn. As much as He puts the rules in place for us, we have to be willing participants in our faith to accept those rules. In this case, *not* becomes a marriage of our asking of God to block us from sinning, as much as it is His offer to do so at our humble request.

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# INTO

By Jen

**Before I was Catholic, I'd never heard the term “near occasion of sin.”** In fact, the entire concept was a new one to me.

The atheistic worldview through which I saw the world had a complicated relationship with *sin*. We rejected the entire concept since it smacked of old-fashioned, overly rigid religious ideas about right and wrong...although, we did think that some things were objectively wrong, such as murder...but we weren't like the religious people, because we were open-minded about what might constitute wrongdoing...sometimes...except when we weren't.

Like I said, it was complicated.

There also wasn't much awareness that it might be good to try to overcome bad behavior that you fall into frequently; usually, the thinking was that if you were really drawn to doing something a lot, it was just an aspect of your personality that you should accept. For example, if someone has a tendency to gossip, in the Christian world there would be a feeling that that is absolutely

possible, with God's help, to overcome this bad behavior. In my old, secular worldview, this tendency would be seen as something hardwired into the person's personality; in fact, it might even be seen as unhealthy for a person to try to suppress a desire to engage in this behavior.

**On top of that, there was the idea that personal autonomy is the highest goal in life.** In order to have a good life, you must be able to do what makes you feel good at any particular moment. To use the gossip example again: If a person had a tendency to that behavior, but had fun hanging out with a group of friends who tempted her to gossip all the time, she would, of course, simply have to continue hanging out with that group of friends. If that's what made her feel happy, that's what she should do. To not do something that was fun for her in order to avoid "bad" behavior would be to have an unfulfilling life.

Combine all that (no clear definition of sin + no hope of overcoming tendencies toward sin + the highest priority for behavior being whatever you feel like doing) and you see why the concept of avoiding near occasions of sin was a new one for me.

I am reminded of all this with the word *into*. **It's a word with physical connotations: Normally, if you talk about someone**

**being led *into* something, you're referring to a physical movement from one place to another.** And yet isn't that how sin usually works? Before you can sin, you have to get yourself *into* a situation where it's possible. If a man has a pornography addiction, he can't commit that type of sin until he sits down in front of his computer, or goes *into* a certain type of store. A woman with a gambling addiction can't lose her family's savings until she steps *into* the casino.

During my conversion, I discovered that sin — objective right and wrong — does exist, and I saw just how damaging our sins are to ourselves, to others, and to God. I came to see that love, not personal autonomy, is the highest goal in life. And so, this idea of avoiding near occasions of sin was a great revelation. I found that there is hope for overcoming those bad things we do that keep us from being loving — and it all starts with not getting *into* situations where we'll be tempted to do them.

# TEMPTATION

By Stacy Trasancos

**The adult-only, clothing-optional Temptation Resort and Spa** in Cancun “dares” you to be tempted and “promises” to deliver the “romantic side of temptation” in the “seductive, luxurious and delicious entertainment” one can find at the “sexy, fun, all-inclusive” vacation experience. While none of us virtue-practicing, family-defending Catholics would remotely suggest that such a dare or promise is acceptable (collective gasp!), to those unfortunate folks un-skilled in the practice of virtue and self-control, those who don’t understand why being led into temptation is dangerous, such vivid imagery is intended to make vice seem like something it isn’t — the beautiful good.

**Temptation is based on lies and distortion.** The resort wouldn’t get as many visitors if it advertised more honestly as a place that “dares” you to be devalued and “promises” to deliver the “degrading side of temptation” in the “sinful, obscene and

slovenly depravity” one can find at the “lewd, vain, self-imprisoning” vacation experience.

Okay, now that’s messed up.

**But why?** It is almost a confusing concept because on one hand we naturally, as creatures made in the image of God, desire that which seems good and beautiful, yet on the other hand, because we are fallen creatures, we also can be tricked into accepting something that only appears to be so, especially if we think we have found a way that is easier to achieve it. Instant satisfaction is very tempting. Yet when we live a life of faith, praying for strength, clarity and grace to be virtuous, to see evil for what it is, we can see beyond temporal appearances. We become wise enough to know that sin cannot be sugar-coated with enticing promises and rendered virtue any more than chocolate syrup can be poured on excrement and be rendered an ice cream sundae. Well, it’s true.

**What is temptation?** Temptation is, simply, an incitement to sin. If it were incitement to virtue, we wouldn’t pray *not* to be led into it. The word “temptation” is from the Latin root word *tentare*, to try or to test, its meaning deeply rooted in Judaism and the Old Testament beginning with the temptation of Eve and original sin.

There is a propensity for evil inherent in us all as a result of original sin, and we will be tested internally and externally. Temptation is not itself, however, sin. Unholy images can be strong, transgressing the moral law is easy in weakness, temporary gratification can be so desirable, but as long as there is no consent or deliberate act of the will, there is no sin.

In theory it is possible to be at Temptation Resort and not sin. One may be reminded of the story of St. Thomas Aquinas, who was tempted by a wide variety of antics and assaults from his family to prevent him from becoming a Dominican preacher. When his older brother sent an exclusive temptress to his room to seduce him at age nineteen, after a long solitary incarceration in a fortress, he chased her out with a flaming firebrand and made a sign of the cross on the door with it (do not try this at home). It is said that later in life he revealed that this event was when he begged God to grant him spiritual and physical integrity.

**Attack is not surrender.** For those trying to diligently serve God, the attacks can seem unrelenting, but temptation can be conquered by humbly distrusting our own power and instead striving for an unbounded confidence in God. Those who find themselves beset with temptation on all fronts can probably

consider themselves called to prayer and service even more, possibly to special heights of sanctity. St. Thomas, after all, did become the Angelic Doctor. Most importantly we have the gift of the Immaculate Virgin and the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who shows us what it takes to avoid all temptation absolutely. Our Savior assures us in his Passion that attack is not surrender.

Whatever our vocation, religious or laity, domestic or professional, temptations can be reminders to pray, even if we give in to them — *especially* if we give into them. As an imperfect mother, I get this.

Whether it's the guilt that sets in after honking at the sneering kid with the falling-off pants who just waddled in front of your truck because you realize he may not have parents to dress him or drive him around; or the shame you feel for yet again steering your virtuous self through the drive-thru window at Burger King because you're just too exhausted to heave two frozen pizzas into the oven; or even the internal struggle you have when time does not pass fast enough to 5:00 PM so you can pour that blessed glass of Chardonnay before you return to the dinner/bath/bedtime routine that will undoubtedly push you to behave like a deranged heathen in front of your husband who's quietly doing all the work



while you screech about the lack of civility in the household — all of that knowing there really are starving and suffering people in the world dying while you whine about minutia — there's always the gift of a prayer to Our Father for renewed graces through the Holy Spirit to try again in the very next second to do better.

Our homes, parishes, and communities where we carry out the duties of our vocations are not Temptation Resorts, nor are they places to escape from daily realities. Rather, they *are* reality; families *are* the Domestic Church, we *are* One Body, and maybe already we even have a taste and peek of the Kingdom of Heaven.

And that is truly good and beautiful, in spite of temptation and our fallen messiness.

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# BUT

By Jen

**I almost skipped this word.** *It's just a conjunction!* I thought. *Is there really anything to say about it?* But then I noticed something.

The *but* in the English translation of the Our Father actually serves an important purpose: It conjoins two thoughts that might otherwise seem to be only loosely related:

*Don't lead us into temptation*

and

*Deliver us from evil*

The prayer does not say, “Lead us not into temptation. And, on an unrelated note, deliverance from evil would be great as well.” The two requests are joined with the word *but*. The last two words of each thought, *temptation* and *evil*, are juxtaposed as to invite a connection.

It's not a connection I make often enough.

I usually talk about temptation as a light concept. *Don't want to be tempted!* I might say with a laugh as I move the Bluebell

Banana Split ice cream to the back of the freezer. But our worst sins almost always begin with a simple temptation. First you're tempted, and only after that do you actually commit the sin. Sin is all about giving in to temptation. And what is sin? That's another concept that some of us (*cough-cough* me) often don't take seriously enough. We'd do well to remember that it is nothing short of cooperation with evil, a willful act of assent to the force that wishes to destroy every good thing and leave nothing but death and destruction in its wake.

When I pray the Our Father tonight, I'll pause on this simple word and note the two phrases it conjoins. And hopefully this will remind me that in order to reject evil, we must first reject temptation.

# DELIVER

By Dan Lord

**When you say “deliver” I think: the large, meaty organ that filters the blood**, right next to degallbladder and depancreas.

I also think of *Prince of Egypt*, and all of those emaciated Hebrews churning mud and singing “Deliver us to the Promised Land...”

Thirdly, I think of demons.

That’s three random connotations all in a row, and they don’t belong together except in some lost David Lynch script.

Scratch the first two, then, and consider these facts: We become angry with one another, we fantasize about the ways we would reduce people to humiliated cinders and how people ought to recognize our extraordinary wonderfulness, we grab for the things we want to the exclusion of others and we like to see others fail. If you can’t admit to being a part of this stuff on some level, then you’re just not being honest with yourself.

**But we are not each other’s enemies.** The nasty, rotten ways in which we all treat each other or would like to treat each other are certainly attributable to lousy choices that we make, but behind it all is a vicious troupe of fallen “powers and principalities” (Eph 6:12) leaping and slithering across the stages of our lives trying to ruin our performances. The correct response is to turn all of their hatred back on them by accepting death: the death of our pride, the death of our will to power. When we do this in Christ, who showed us what “dying to self” really means, we do something for which our spiritual antagonizers have absolutely no comeback.

Evil spirits are real. Our Father in heaven knows it—he sent His only Son precisely to deliver us from their power. Jesus was who those emaciated Hebrews in *Prince of Egypt* were really yearning for, though they didn’t know it—so I guess that connotation is relevant, after all. Not the “deliver/degalbladder” thing, though...that’s just an obnoxious pun.

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*Fully Christian Life. He is also the author of the fictional By the Downward Way, and its sequel, From a Dark Wayover. Explore more of his work at [ThatStrangestofWars.com](http://ThatStrangestofWars.com).*

# FROM

By Jen

**When I come to this word, I notice not so much the word itself,** but the words that *aren't* there. Notice that there is nothing between the words *from* and *evil*. It's not "deliver us from stuff that is evil," or "deliver us from situations where evilness might occur." *Deliver us from evil*. The word that follows *from* is in the singular, and is unadorned with adjectives or qualifiers.

For me, this evokes thoughts of the personal nature of evil.

The Catechism tells us:

*In this petition, evil is not an abstraction, but refers to a person, Satan, the Evil One, the angel who opposes God. The devil (diabolos) is the one who "throws himself across" God's plan and his work of salvation accomplished in Christ.*

One of the biggest ways in which my conversion to Christianity has assisted me in terms of practical, day-to-day living is that I now understand the reality of spiritual warfare. Back when I was



an atheist I *felt* the blows and the injuries, but didn't know where they came from. I had no idea that I was standing on a battlefield.

Through the wisdom of the Church, I've learned how to recognize many of the techniques of the enemy; I've come to understand how to protect myself from his attacks; and I've been given the armor to keep me safe from his weapons. And if I could distill everything I've learned down to the single most important thing to know, it would be this:

Never forget that evil is personal.

**Even within mainstream Christianity, there's a tendency to think of evil as an impersonal force**, like an earthquake or a lightning strike. But evil is not a disinterested phenomenon. As odd as it sounds to modern ears, the truth is that devil and his demons are smart — smarter than we are — and they tailor their plans of attack to each individual. They have a special plan, just for you. They'll use different techniques for you than they do when they try to keep your neighbor or your brother or me away from God. And the stakes are high, since they aim to kill not only our physical bodies, but our eternal souls as well.

When you think about the enemy we're up against, consider his intelligence, and the endless energy he has to put toward

conquering in this winner-takes-all game, it fills you with a renewed understanding of just how dependent we are on God's grace. **It makes you realize with trembling that this is a battle that we simply cannot fight alone.** And so we speak these last words of the Our Father with great urgency, as we beg the only One who can save us, *Deliver us from evil.*

# EVIL

By Betty Duffy

**Evil's the last word. And it would be nice if we never had to think about it.** But we're human, and we have original sin, so evil will always be a concern to Christians.

It will always be a concern, because evil is...interesting. When people talk about "the banality of evil" they don't mean that evil itself is boring. They mean that evil makes itself appealing to so many people that an entire culture can accept horrendous acts as though they are normal. The casual societal attitude towards pornography is an example of the banality of evil. So's the Holocaust.

Of course there's nothing casual about what sin does to people. We become attached, physically, emotionally, habitually entrenched in it. Sin can define lives. And it can define lives even if the sin is venial rather than some malicious mortal sin like murder or adultery. It can be soft sin, light sin, fun, interesting, harmless sin. Or so we tell ourselves.

Life in Eden before the Fall was perfect, but perhaps secretly, we wonder how much fun Adam and Eve could really have had without the stimulus of fiery tempers, flirtations with a more glamorous world, and the occasional over-indulgence in chocolate? Weren't they pretty much just tending garden and looking after animals? Sounds like work to me.

**Evil, as anyone who has ever lived will tell you, can be terribly, terribly attractive.** Eve had everything she could possibly have wanted, but she wanted more.

The particular horror of Eve's sin is that we don't really blame her. In her place, I would have done the exact same thing. God prohibited my eating from this tree—but obviously, God was talking to the lowest common denominator, rather than a good person like me. It's just knowledge after all.

It's just a little gluttony. Just a little anger. You might just say I'm "spirited," when I throw that darn lego piece across the living room, or that I'm on the pursuit of excellence when I berate my husband for not living up to my standards. My addiction to (fill in the blank) is just a part of my personality. **Garfield would not be Garfield, after all, without his inordinate attachment to lasagna.**

Pope Benedict XVI wrote in a Homily, December 8, 2005:

“We think that evil is basically good. We think we need it, at least a little, in order to experience the fullness of being.”

—Pope Benedict XVI, “Benedictus” p. 288

In allowing that little bit of evil to persist in our souls to salvage what we wrongly think is our winning personality, we inevitably block out the action of grace in our lives. We know what the devil wants, our souls, and we’re not giving in. But we avoid asking God what he wants. We have a sneaking suspicion that he too wants our souls. But what if he puts rules on my life? What if he makes me suffer? He’s going to white out my personality, my quirks, and turn me into an automaton. We make God our rival.

**And so we do not belong to the devil in any obvious way—too smart for that—but we do not belong to God.** We belong to ourselves, which is, ironically, exactly where the devil wants us—in a bind, refusing to grow.

It’s only in hindsight that we realize what heavens we have lost through our sin.

As soon as the sinner recognizes his need for grace, it is there. We have a Redeemer who releases all binds. He, and only He, delivers us from the tendency towards evil that is our birthright.

He delivers us from our attraction to sin, and fosters a new dependency on his grace and mercy, a dependency that unexpectedly makes us more free than our supposed independence.

“The person who abandons himself totally in God’s hands does not become God’s puppet, a boring ‘yes man.’ Only the person who entrusts himself totally to God finds true freedom, the great creative immensity of the freedom of good. The person who turns to God does not become smaller, but greater, for through God and with God he becomes great, he becomes divine, he becomes truly himself.” (Benedictus p. 288)

When we pray, “Lord, deliver us from evil,” we think, not only of the evil “out there,” which most of us have become pretty adept at sidestepping, **but deliver us from the evil within.** Christ, our Redeemer, knows what we need before we ask. Deliver us from the evil we don’t see, the evil to which we have become attached and blind, the evil that is an obstacle to our surrender, the evil that sees God as a rival, that prevents love towards our fellow man, but that also prevents us from falling truly, deeply in love with Christ.

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# Conclusion

I hope you enjoyed this word-by-word reflection on the Our Father. As I reviewed these essays to put together this ebook, I realized just what a treasure trove of wisdom is contained in these pages. I encourage you to look up the authors who contributed their thoughts, as many of them continue to share their insights through their books and blogs.

**If you would like to share this book with others, it is available for free at [JenniferFulwiler.com/Our-Father](http://JenniferFulwiler.com/Our-Father).**

With my prayers and warmest wishes,

Jennifer Fulwiler



# About Jen

Jennifer Fulwiler is a writer, speaker, and the host of the Jennifer Fulwiler Show, which airs from 2 - 4 PM ET daily on SiriusXM 129. Her bestselling memoir, [\*Something Other than God\*](#), was a finalist in the 2014 Goodreads Reader Choice Awards, and her ebook collection of humor essays, [\*Like Living Among Scorpions\*](#), was a #1 bestseller in its genre on Amazon. She lives with her husband and six children in Austin, Texas. You can connect with her on social media at:

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