

THY KINGDOM COME

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Living the Lord's Prayer in Everyday Life

Fr. Jeffrey Kirby, STD

TAN Books
Gastonia, North Carolina

Thy Kingdom Come: Living the Lord's Prayer in Everyday Life ©
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To
My Father,
Alan Joseph Kirby, Jr.

Praise for *Thy Kingdom Come* . . .

Fr. Kirby offers solid and practical guidance for contemplating and living each of the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer. Along the way, he helps us to discover how to draw closer to God through the Beatitudes, virtues, gifts of the Spirit etc. His exciting "school of discipleship" is all about making deep connections. Highly recommended!

—SCOTT HAHN, PHD

Fr. Michael Scanlan Chair of Biblical Theology and the
New Evangelization, Franciscan University of Steubenville

The "Our Father" is so ingrained in the minds of most Christians that we all too often recite it merely by rote. *Thy Kingdom Come* is a most welcome reminder of the worlds of meaning in every phrase of the prayer that Jesus taught us.

—MARY ANN GLENDON

Former U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See

Clearly, Fr. Jeff Kirby has reflected deeply on the words of Lord's Prayer. In this book, he shares his insights to help us experience more fully the love of the heart of our heavenly Father.

—FATHER MICHAEL GAITLEY, MIC

Author of *33 Days to Merciful Love*

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FOREWORD

The early Church writer Tertullian made the striking comment that the Lord's Prayer "is truly the summary of the whole gospel." And he went on to say, "In summaries of so few words, how many utterances of the prophets, the Gospels, the apostles—how many discourses, examples, parables of the Lord, are touched on! How many duties are simultaneously discharged!" In its explanation of this summary of the Gospel, *Thy Kingdom Come* provides us with rich fare, drawing out the words of the Our Father and demonstrating how the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Beatitudes, and the virtues unite around its petitions—and also how the individual petitions strengthen us against the vices and sins that threaten to dislodge the work of God within us.

The Our Father is a prayer. Father Kirby draws out for us here its riches as a *teaching* from the Lord. Well-known for his ability to unite vibrant and engaging teaching with a deep concern for building up the spiritual life, he provides in this latest work sustenance for our Christian lives through a wholesome diet of good teaching. This work not only feeds the mind but also draws out and strengthens the heart at the same time. Here we will find strong foundations for sustaining our response to the Lord's invitation to us.

The Our Father offers us doctrine in the form of prayer. It provides us with the center and heart of what we can term a “dogmatic spirituality.” There are many spiritualities in the Church’s tradition—Franciscan, Dominican, Ignatian, Carmelite, and so on. Each one of these offers a distinct path, a distinct way of living out the call to holiness. However, underlying each of these paths and structuring them in different ways are the central truths of the faith that are the fundamental bedrock of our lives. The magnificent truths concerning the Blessed Trinity, concerning Jesus Christ, true God and true man, concerning our participation in the life of grace—it is from these that we live, and from which we draw our deepest springs of life. And these truths and the Christian way that flows from them is summed up for us in this prayer taught to us by Our Lord. Here we have the “quintessential” prayer of the *whole* Church (CCC 2776), the prayer common to *all* Christian paths and spiritualities, the prayer that sums up the Gospel.

This work by Father Kirby uses the same catechetical approach towards the Lord’s Prayer as is found in his recent book on the Beatitudes. As with that work, this new publication not only teaches but also explores the depth and *practical* application of what St. Thomas Aquinas described as “the most perfect of prayers.” The subtitle to Father Kirby’s work provides us with his key focus: “*Living the Lord’s Prayer in Everyday Life.*” The beautiful uniting of narrative and personal witness that we find here, together with an evident pastoral wisdom and a penetrating examination of conscience attached to each petition, enable us to see how the words of this prayer can truly “take flesh” in in our lives.

And throughout this overriding concern for the *living* of

the prayer, Father Kirby never lets us forget that the growth of the kingdom of God in life is itself a thing unseen and secret. The source of its growth consists precisely in the relationship of prayer and in the love and service of God growing in our hearts. For each of us, he provides a reminder here of the priority that the Church has always accorded to prayer and to contemplation, where we find “a communion of love bearing Life for the multitude” (CCC 2719). While Father Kirby helps us to look outwards from prayer into life, he also helps us to remember that our outward gaze of love flows from the fact that the Father has first looked upon us with love in secret.

The Scottish poet Edwin Muir captures the essence of such a gaze, coming from the eyes of Love into ordinary life, beautifully in his poem *Annunciation*:

The angel and the girl are met. . . .
See, they have come together, see,
While the destroying minutes flow,
Each reflects the other's face
Till heaven in hers and earth in his
Shine steadily there . . .

Outside the window footsteps fall
Into the ordinary day
And with the sun along the wall
Pursue their unreturning way . . .

But through the endless afternoon
These neither speak nor movement make,
But stare into their deepening trance
As if their gaze would never break.

It is the power of just such a gaze, the gaze of the Father, that this most perfect of prayers gives to us if we are faithful to it, and which allows us to turn towards others in everyday life.

Petroc Willey STL, PhD

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PREFACE

New Awareness

Thank you for picking up this book!

Many of us know the words of the Lord's Prayer, often learning them as we were still learning to speak. We assume we know what these words mean, but their depth can be taken for granted. This book is designed to get us beyond what we think we know and instead guide us through the beauty and wisdom of the prayer. It's also meant to show us the practical dimensions and applications of the prayer.

"Our Father"

Some years ago, my brother traveled with me to a parish mission in Florida. When we arrived, the local parish leaders invited us out to dinner. We were happy to join them. The group was a happy bunch. The food was good, the conversation was pleasant, and there was an overall sense of welcome and joy.

At some point in the meal, one of the parish leaders asked my brother and me a question about our family. While

attempting to answer her question, I said something like, “Well, *our father* was in the military. . . .” I stopped and chuckled. The words *our father* were so close to the opening words of the Lord’s Prayer that they struck me and sounded comical. The wording was unique for me.

Normally, I would travel by myself or with an assistant who is not a family member. Or, if I *was* with my brother or sister, I would use the more colloquial “Dad.” Or, many times, I would use a singular pronoun, “my father,” with the presumption that it extended to one of my siblings. For all these reasons, I was surprised by my use of “*our father*.”

Later, as I thought about it, I realized that there are only two people on the entire planet with whom I could use that term—namely, my brother and my sister. We three are the children of one father. We are united by one father. And only with one another can we use the plural pronoun *our*. This reflection helped me grasp the closeness I have with my brother and sister *because of my father*. It helped me to feel even more loved and more united with my father, my siblings, and my family.

This brief story illustrates what the Lord Jesus says and offers to each of us. As he led the apostles in their tutorial on prayer, Jesus said, “Our Father.” He united himself to each of us as a true sibling. He draws familial bonds with us and reveals the Father to us. The Lord says to us, “Yes, he is *our Father*. I say this with you because we are the children of the same Father. What I am by nature, you are by adoption. We are united. We are family. We are given a kingdom and a way of life. Accept the Father’s love. Live in that love. Share his message. Spread this kingdom.”

Some Helpful Truths

For this reason, the Lord entrusted us with his prayer. The words of the prayer can teach and form our hearts to have the interior attitude of Jesus. It can show us the relationship that the Lord has with God the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit. As we seek to imitate this relationship in our own lives, we think, love, and act more and more as the children of God. This book will explore this inner rapport and display for us the internal outline and way of life that are a part of being a beloved child of God.

As a start, here's some good news drawn from the Lord's Prayer.

You Are Greatly Loved

Our fallen world tells us that we need to earn love. We have to look or conform to a certain way of life that is merely external or self-centered if we want to be loved. Love has been redefined as pleasure or as a person's own emotional fulfillment, or as manipulation or control over the freedom of others. With such fragmented views of love, many people have given up on the idea of true and lasting love. Many people do not trust love and they recoil at the very idea. But God smashes the idols of false love and breaks through the façade of false definitions, and in his Son, Jesus Christ, he declares an everlasting love for each of us. He says to us what he said to the Lord Jesus, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17).

God invites us to live boldly and to accept this amazing offer of true love. He can tear down the barriers of narcissism

and misguided love and offer a true relationship because he is Love (cf. 1 Jn 4:7–21). And authentic love is seeking the good of another (cf. Jn 15:13; 1 Jn 3:16). We are told by St. Paul, “Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends” (1 Cor 13:4–8). This is who God is, and it’s the life-giving love that he offers to each of us.

You Have a Loving Father

The love that God has for each of us reaches its fullest expression in one word: *father*. This word summarizes the fullness of concern, care, acceptance, affection, protection, affirmation, discipline, and selfless service that we all crave as human beings and need in order to flourish as children of God (cf. Heb 12:3–11). It’s important to stress this heavenly standard. When we call God “Father,” we are not projecting a human relationship onto God. Quite the contrary! Any man who has been given the vocation of fatherhood is merely imitating the same role God fulfills over the whole of humanity (cf. Eph 3:15).

God is not like a human father. God is Father. His entire being is Father. And certain men on earth are blessed with this title since their vocation is to reflect God in their families. These men are given a divine title. Sadly, we know not every man lives up to this vocation (or even tries to live up to it). This neglect or brokenness can cause great harm to their children and families. Perhaps you’ve suffered through this brokenness. The good news is that no matter what our earthly

experience has been of our fathers, we all have a loving and caring heavenly Father (cf. Mt 7:11).

This Father was fully revealed to us by Jesus Christ (cf. Mt 11:25–27), and God greatly desires to be this Father to you, to me, and to each of his beloved children. He wants to heal any wounds, console any pain, and bless us with the hope and strength that comes with his love.

You Are Called to Be a Member of God's Family

As human beings, we are hardwired for community and need acceptance, love, and belonging. We were made that way since we were created in the image of the living God (Gn 1:27). And God is not eternal solitude! The living God dwells forever as a divine family: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 17:1–5; Mt 28:19–20). We were created in the image of this divine family, planting an innate impulse within each of us to search for the living God and worship him, and to share divine fellowship with him. This is also why we have an inescapable drive in our human nature to have family ties and to be in a community with other people.

God searches for us, he calls to us, and invites us to be a part of his divine family. He sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to ransom us from the darkness of our fallen world, and in his saving work, the Lord Jesus revealed the face of our Father to us. Jesus wants to show us the way to the Father. In our sinfulness, we want to make God a harsh judge or cruel master. We want to see ourselves as slaves, as if God is repressing us or destroying our freedom. It's as if he wants us to fear him, or so we think. This master/slave paradigm is completely

dismantled by the teachings of Jesus Christ. He unveils that God is a loving Father and we are called to be in his family. God wants a Father/child relationship with us. He wants us to flourish, grow, and prosper as his children.

In this way, we can say that the single word *father* is a summary of the entire plan of salvation. It discloses the very heart of God and the identity from which he loves and to which he calls us.

Jesus shows us the way to join God's family. When the apostles asked Jesus to teach them how to pray (Mt 6:9), he told them, "Pray then like this: Our Father . . ." Did you catch that pronoun? He said "our." He included us with himself. The Son sees us as his brothers and siblings by grace. God is Father to us all and Jesus, who is Lord, is also our older brother. He is the firstborn of all creation (cf. Col 1:15–20). We are invited to be a part of this family. The Lord welcomes us into the divine family. This is the reason why we were made and is the only source of complete happiness.

God's Family Is a Kingdom

When we accept the invitation to be a part of God's family, we also enter a kingdom. It's a kingdom of truth, love, justice, peace, and reconciliation. Living as members of this kingdom, we're formed and educated on what we should desire in our hearts, and even the process, or sequence, in which they should be desired. This path is shown to us the more we say yes to God's will and the more we desire his will over our own.

You Are Commissioned to Spread This Kingdom

When we see the goodness of God's kingdom, we begin to realize its power. We deepen in our commitment that God's kingdom can bring light from darkness, healing from brokenness, and grace from sinfulness. This causes a deep desire within us to spread God's kingdom and to see it manifested in our world. As the children of God, we grow in our commission to announce, labor, and suffer for his kingdom. The more we realize the glory that is offered to us, the more we pine and groan for God's kingdom to triumph. This is the kingdom entrusted to us, and as the children of God, we determine if, where, and how it will come.

In going through all of these points, you might be struck by the depth and breadth of the truths. And it might cause you to ask, "Are all these really contained in one prayer?" The definitive answer is yes, all of these truths are contained, taught, and proclaimed in the Lord's Prayer.

This book will help us journey through these different truths and understand everything that the Lord Jesus wants to show us.

Diving Deeper

In reviewing these essential points from the Lord's Prayer, you have taken the first step. But there is so much more! We need to begin a deeper exploration of the seven principal tenets of the prayer entrusted to us by Jesus Christ, who is God and man, Lord and older brother. I invite you to take this deeper dive and continue reading as we dissect and evaluate each

portion of this sacred prayer.

The Lord prays, “Thy kingdom come.” Let this same petition be in our hearts. Let it inspire us to dive deeper!

INTRODUCTION

THE TALE OF TWO FATHERS

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God; I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

JOHN 8:42–44

A Father's Witness

Many years ago, my older brother was deployed to Afghanistan. He was born to be a soldier, jumping out of perfectly good airplanes and eagerly running into situations that most people flee. And yet, this deployment was heavy on everyone's heart. The situation in the war-torn area at the time would come to be seen as one of the worst in the decades-long military

engagement. As the time came for my brother's departure, he was unusually nervous. My mother was crying and my father seemed extraordinarily pensive.

As my brother prepared to leave, my father gave the softly spoken command, "Stop," and that was enough to suspend our world. As a retired soldier, dad always spoke succinctly and one pitch above what most people would consider normal. The muffled, one-word order seemed to stop everything. We all looked. We all waited.

From his pocket, my father pulled out a small golden lock. It looked like something that would be used to lock a small file cabinet. I hadn't seen it before. He showed it to the family and then specifically to my brother. He took my brother by the shoulder and walked him over to the grandfather clock that was always in the living room. It was an anniversary gift from my father to my mother many years before. The clock was as much a fixture in the house as us kids. As Dad walked my brother over to the clock, we all followed. It became a quiet little procession for a family that's usually loud and all over the place.

When my dad got to the grandfather clock, he took the lock from his hand, reached out, and locked it on the door. As he did this, he was visibly shaking and holding back tears. After closing the lock, he turned to my brother and with a sadness that only love can understand, said to him, "This is where my heart will be until you come home."

It was a rare disclosure of the tender love that fills my father's heart and that constantly seeks to care for and protect his children and family. While it was usually expressed in hard work, sacrifice, and tempered discipline, my father's love was tangible in that single, sacred moment. For my dad, the lock

was his heart and the grandfather clock was the time that my brother would be away at war.

Throughout his deployment, every delay in communication with my brother set my father into distant thought. He would regularly rub his hands and was slow to laugh. And every time there was an email, or letter, or even a phone call from my brother, Dad was elated and on cloud nine for days. In many respects, my father absorbed and expressed the emotions of the entire family.

It was a joy for all of us when my brother came home. I will never forget how my father embraced him and the tears he shed that day. As I will also never forget walking into the living room the next day and seeing the golden lock removed and gone from the grandfather clock.

This story illustrates one father's intense love and sense of mission for his family. It's a story that's played out in various ways and with different details in families throughout the world. It's called fatherhood. And as moving and inspiring as some of the stories are about our earthly fathers, they are mere reflections of the all-holy love and affection that God the Father has for each one of us.

As we see shining examples of fatherhood in this world, we are invited to look above and to realize that these men, called to be fathers on earth, are reflections and witnesses of our eternal Father who dwells in unending light. We are called to see God's love for us and to acknowledge and accept his perfect fatherhood into our lives. Each of us is welcomed into his family. We are invited to hear the tender words of the Lord Jesus, "*Our Father*," and to make them our own. We are offered the grace to live as members of God's family, and not as some lost orphans or abandoned children.

We have a choice. We have a heavenly Father who loves us and who wants to care for and protect us in the midst of a fallen and broken world that can hurt and harm us. In the midst of it all, our Father beckons to us. He calls us by name. Will we accept?

Two Families, Two Fathers, Two Kingdoms

The invitation given to us by God our Father to accept and reciprocate his love is fully developed in the Lord's Prayer. Throughout the tenets of this great prayer, the tender care and affection God has for each of us is on complete display. In this systematic way, we can clearly see throughout the prayer how deeply God loves us and wants to bless us.

But we know there's another offer on the table. Made free, we have a choice. And there is a false father—a liar—who wants us to follow him in his narcissism and rebellion against God.

In the options given to us, we have two families, two fathers:

- There is the divine family—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—with the fatherhood of the living God.

Or

- There is the infinitely inferior, fallen family—me, myself, and I—with the deceptive, selfish fatherhood of the evil one.

These two families, and these two fathers, are placed before us. We have to decide which of the two families we will have fellowship with, which of the two fathers we will have father

us, and which of the two kingdoms we will spread in our world.

Before his passion, death, and resurrection, the Lord Jesus solemnly promised us, “I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him” (Jn 14:18–21).

In this promise, the Christ—who conquers evil and dispels darkness—tells us that those who love him and keep his commands will not be orphans. When he accomplishes his saving work and departs, those who obey him will be “in him” and dwell with the Father. The Lord also tells his followers that he will send the Spirit to guide them. The conditional aspect of this promise cannot be overlooked or taken for granted. The Lord indicated that the divine family, and the blessings that come with divine fellowship, will be given to those who love him and obey him. In short, the graces will be given to those who truly want them.

The evil one, who is also called the devil (which means “accuser”) or Satan (which means “adversary”), offers us an easier life. The fellowship he offers has no blessing but is consumed with egotism, power, vanity, wealth, and pleasure. It calls for no obedience other than to one’s own whims and fantasies. It’s a glamorous offer, the spiritual equivalent of flashing lights, loud music, and egocentric celebrations. Rather than love of God and neighbor, we are offered a life of conceit and self-absorption.

These are two ways of life flowing from two families, two fathers, and two kingdoms. The choice is ours. What will we decide?

Internal Structure of the Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer contains a spiritual portrait of Jesus's entire life. He reveals how we are to live as a son or daughter of God. Whenever we pray it, therefore, we should always remember that we pray it through, with, and in Jesus. In Jesus Christ, the prayer provides us with an interior path for us to follow. The path described in the prayer provides us with seven tenets, or signposts, along the way.

After the earth-shaking salutation, "Our Father," the prayer moves into a three-fold declaration of praise and a four-fold series of petitions. The two portions of the prayer reflect the two tablets of the Ten Commandments: the first pertains to our adoration of God, while the second pertains to what we need from God and how we are to interact with our neighbor.

The first portion of the Lord's Prayer consists of his glory: "Thy Name," "Thy Kingdom," and "Thy Will."

The second portion of the Lord's Prayer consists of our poverty: "Give us," "Forgive us," "Lead us," and "Deliver us."

As we can see, the Lord's Prayer teaches us to realize what we should desire and guides us to recognize the sequence in which things should be desired. This book will walk through the sequence, describing each tenet, and developing what each one means and how we can understand and use them in our search and struggle to live as the children of God.

“School of Discipleship”

In moving forward, we’ll explore the salutation of the prayer. After the salutation, we’ll walk through each tenet of the Lord’s Prayer, showing how it’s lived out in Scripture and in everyday life, as well as examine their amazing connections to the Beatitudes, the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, the virtues of the Christian tradition, and the deadly sins.

At the close of each chapter on the various tenets of the prayer, you will see a kind of “spiritual matrix” unfold before your eyes, found in a section called “School of Discipleship.” This matrix, or chart, outlines a web of connections that link the central components of our spiritual life. For the purposes of our “School of Discipleship,” we will call these “Subjects.” Only the row in question can be found in each chapter, but the complete matrix can be seen in the back.

If you have read my book from 2018, *Kingdom of Happiness*, then this “School” should sound familiar. This spiritual matrix was first used as a platform for a discussion of the Beatitudes, while in this book our focus is the Lord’s Prayer. If you have not read *Kingdom of Happiness*, I encourage you to go read it after this book. The books are not written in any specific order but rather show the beautiful harmony that exists between all these aspects of the spiritual life.

To help you better understand these “Subjects,” here is a brief description of each one. Please read these summaries now and refer back to them, if needed, as you read through the book.

Beatitudes: The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* calls the Beatitudes “the heart of Jesus’ preaching” (CCC 1716) and identifies them as “the countenance of Jesus Christ” (CCC

1717). The Beatitudes are further described as expressing “the vocation of the faithful associated with the glory of his Passion and Resurrection; they shed light on the actions and attitudes characteristic of the Christian life; they are the paradoxical promises that sustain hope in the midst of tribulations” (CCC 1717). In the twists and turns of life, the Beatitudes are the quick reference points of the kingdom of God. The *Catechism* teaches us that “the Beatitudes confront us with decisive choices concerning earthly goods; they purify our hearts in order to teach us to love God above all things” (CCC 1728).

Christian Virtues: The *Catechism* defines virtue as “an habitual and firm disposition to do good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions” (CCC 1803). St. Gregory of Nyssa, in his *On the Beatitudes*, says, “The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God.” The *Catechism* names seven Christian, or “heavenly,” virtues, broken up into two categories. The four cardinal virtues are prudence, justice, temperance, and courage, while the three theological virtues are faith, hope, and charity (see CCC 1804–29).

Gifts of the Holy Spirit: The *Catechism* tells us that “the moral life of Christians is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are permanent dispositions which make man docile in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit. . . . They belong in their fullness to Christ, Son of David. They complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them” (CCC 1830–31). In short, these are exactly what they sound like—generous gifts from the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, which he bestows upon us at the will of the Father.

They allow us to become better and more virtuous people and overcome the pitfalls of the deadly sins. The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord (sometimes referred to as “wonder” or “awe”).

Seven Deadly Sins: The *Catechism* defines sin as “an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity” (CCC 1849). Though there are many different sorts of sins, the Church and her tradition classifies them in a list of seven “capital” or “deadly” sins. Each transgression we commit can be traced back to pride, avarice (greed), envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth (CCC 1866).

Note: As you read through the explanation and study the chart, remember that we are drawing all these things back to the tenets of the Lord’s Prayer, not necessarily drawing parallels between the “Subjects” themselves. While the Christian tradition does have a history of showing the interconnectedness of these aspects of the spiritual life, our work is focused on their relationship to the Lord’s Prayer. Additionally, all explanations are kept brief to simply graze the surface of this rich theology. For any reader who wishes to go deeper, see the bibliography for resources that can provide more detail.