

THURSDAY, 11TH WEEK

HOW TO PRAY

Matthew 6: 7-15

The Lord's Prayer is reported in two gospels, Matthew and Luke. In Matthew, Jesus prefaces it by advising us not to use many words, or babble formulae as the pagans did. Why did Jesus say this?

It was pagan practice to bombard the gods with formulae, to induce them to be favourable to humankind. You still see this way of praying in certain circles and groupings of prayer today. The point Jesus is making in this Gospel is that we should not be praying in that mechanical way. Our heavenly Father cannot be persuaded; neither can he be manipulated by heaping up endless petitions. Rather, Jesus teaches us to surrender to whatever God wills.

What Jesus wants us to want most are three things:

- a) uphold God's glory,
- b) openness to the coming of God's kingdom,
- c) and the doing of God's will.

We don't need to spend all our energies just asking for what we want. We should pray for what God wants. We ought to acknowledge our dependence on God for our basic needs — for food for the day, for forgiveness, for strength to go on living.

If at all the Lord's Prayer is powerful, it is for sure powerful in its simplicity. As such it is not simply one prayer among many; it is an iconic teaching on how to pray.