Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

October 5, 2021
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint



“Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1).

Jon 4:1-11; Luke 11:1-4

Luke’s version of the “Our Father” is only 38 words long. To call it a summary or distillation of Jesus’ teaching on prayer is to then be challenged to listen deeply to its words to grasp why Jesus considered it the essence of his own relationship with God and his desire to share this relationship with his disciples. Matthew’s version is slightly longer and organizes the prayer into seven petitions. Like the *Sh’ma*, the Great Commandment to love God and neighbor, Jesus’ prayer first focuses on God and then on love of one another.

Jesus offers this prayer when his disciples ask him to teach them to pray as John the Baptist had taught his disciples. Rather than give them a formula, Jesus invites them to stand with him in his own relationship by calling God “our father.” But, instead of using a formal name for a patriarchal father, Jesus calls God *Abba*, an intimate name a child might use to cry out “Papa” or “Da Da.”

So, the prayer begins by drawing his disciples into a familial and unconditional love relationship between a child and parent. Everything they need, from daily bread to protection from evil, will be provided. The only thing that can interrupt this family resemblance to God is if we do not forgive one another, for mercy in the very nature of God. Many great theologians have ended their careers by pondering the “Our Father.” Karl Menninger, the father of modern psychology, meditated on it during his final weeks of life, believing it held everything needed to resolve society’s problems.

Gerhard Lohfink, a German New Testament scholar, explores the “Our Father” in detail by recovering Jesus’ prayer in the original context of his life and ministry, His small book (Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN) is a treasury of insight and inspiration I highly recommend to readers of Pencil Preaching.

Advertisement