

Tuesday, July 7, 2020

Our father—not my father

- Pastor Hank French

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name (Matthew 6:9).

There is...one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:6).

When reading the Bible, it is common to focus on paragraphs, whole sentences, phrases, big words. Little words often get lost in the rush to understand. That's too bad; the meaning of a long sentence often hinges on the meaning of small words—prepositions, pronouns, adjectives. It's like cooking where the slightest dash of spice can enhance the flavor of the whole dish.

When reading the Bible in a devotional way, don't ignore the little words. Savor each word as if it were the main course. Let each word have its own moment in your consciousness, a moment to suggest associations, to evoke insights, to raise questions. Be like the prophet Jeremiah who (metaphorically, of course) declared to God: "Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart..." (15:16).

Today we want to savor one little word— "our." "Our" is the possessive form of the pronoun "we." It implies something in common, as in: "We went to Europe for a week but *our* flight was delayed, *our* baggage got lost, *our* accommodations were terrible, *our* food was awful, we both got sick, and *our* trip was ruined!" Two or more people with a common experience, a common possession, a common hope, a common fear, a common joy, a common sorrow. Two or more people standing in solidarity with each other. Two or more people somehow bound together. All of this is contained in the word "our."

"Our Father...." If God is *our* Father, then God is not only *my* Father. We share a Father. We are part of something larger than ourselves—a family as it were. If God is *our* Father, then *all* other people are, in a profound sense, our sisters and brothers. We belong to and are responsible for each other. You will notice that there are no first-person pronouns in the Lord's prayer. In no way is the Lord's Prayer ever *my* prayer. It is always *our* prayer, and whenever we pray it our attention should turn not only to our own needs but also to the needs of others.

We never pray this prayer alone. Whenever we pray these words we stand with every other person—whether they pray this prayer or not.

In the Old Testament, it is not uncommon to find God referred to as the father of Israel, that is, as the God who established Israel as his own special people (e.g., Deuteronomy 32:6). It is, however, somewhat unusual to find "father" used as a term of personal address to God in the way Jesus used it. Clearly Jesus' relationship with God was both interpersonal and intimate, and the wonder is that by teaching his followers this prayer, he invites us into an equally personal and intimate relationship with God.

Prayer: Loving God, open my eyes that I may see other people as your children—loved by you as much as I am loved by you. Amen.