

A REFLECTION ON THE OUR FATHER

OCTOBER 15, 2018

We are going to, as promised look at the Our Father today this will be sort of a stand-alone show. I was asked to review I book a while back for an endorsement. The book is titled “Abba Isn’t Daddy and Other Biblical Surprises What Catholics Really Need to Know About Scripture Study”. He, sort of, provides an orientation to the Church’s history of, and practice of, scripture scholarship. He is a scripture scholar himself, Father William Burton OFM. He is a popular speaker at the LA religious education Congress and this particular book, one of my publishers asked me to endorse it and so, because of the content of the book I asked to, rather than just read the proposal and first chapter, I asked to read the whole book. I got the whole manuscript and in it is this little jewel of a suggestion that I’m going to share with you and I think it’s interesting, that he didn’t seem to know that this suggestion is also in the catechism, in the form of a statement, or a declaration, rather than really a suggestion. But it’s very interesting how he comes to his view of the Our Father prayer. The catechism tells us that the Our Father is a summary of the whole gospel. So, what I’d like today, in this standalone show, it’s just going to be the one show on the Our Father, I’d like to just talk about this prayer because after I studied it a little, I realized that it was not an issue, or a matter, or a finding that I could just throw into another show. It actually needed to be part of something on its own; but then again, I didn’t want to get into an entire series on the Our Father anyway.

So, I’m going to do this one show on the Our Father and then I’m going to take a break for a week or two, and then we’re going to start our next series and it’s going to be called “Dew of Heaven”. We’re going to talk about rest, what rest is, what does the Bible say about rest and I’ll share some experiences of how God really taught me about rest. So, we’re going to look at that as a discipline, not a luxury. Some of you rest too much you’re lazy. But some of you overdo it and you’re probably OCD and perfectionists and if that’s the case then you find it very difficult to rest even if you’re still. So, we’re going to talk about that in our next series, Dew of Heaven. I’m not sure how many weeks of a break I’ll take it’s going to depend on how much study it’s going to require. I have actually written this study a while back but it’s not complete. So, in any case that will be our next series. If I can get it in before the end of the year, I might try to do that. If I don’t think I’m going to be able to get it all in, because of the holidays and that kind of thing, then I’ll probably just wait and take that break all the way through the first of the year, which I know will drive some of you crazy. I do like to take that break every single year between Thanksgiving and New Year’s, I just need it; my family needs it. In any case, the Dew of Heaven will be our next study. I don’t know when, so just keep watching the Facebook discussion page and my public Facebook page; Sonja Corbitt.

So, we’re talking about the Lord’s Prayer and we’re going to look at the origins of it and as I said the catechism tells us that it is a summary of the whole gospel. We are really familiar with this prayer the Our father, or the Lord’s Prayer sometimes it’s called, and it’s a prayer that many of us pray daily, and often several times a day because we either pray the rosary or something else - if you’re at Mass. Catholics pray a version that’s a little bit shorter then the one that is used in Protestant traditions. I remember my mother when she discovered that I was going to become Catholic, that was one of the first things she said, “Well they don’t pray all of the Our Father prayer.” you know? I thought that was funny. But, there’s actually evidence that Christians have been praying this prayer during the Eucharist from the very earliest times. If you ask actually any priest and it’s kind of interesting because, if you ask a priest who has witnessed a marriage between a Catholic and a Jewish person, he’ll probably tell

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you that the one prayer that he and the rabbi agree on, that the Jews and the Christians can both pray together, is the Our Father and isn't that interesting? And that's what we're kind of going to look at.

So, the prayer is really well known to us and it's so well known that we mostly recite it automatically without really even giving it any thought. And yet it's true that there is this whole body of fascinating theological history behind the prayer. It's a prayer that is found in the gospels of Matthew and Luke and several phrases of the prayer are also sprinkled in two other places in the gospel of Mark. One of the most exciting things, I think, about the prayer is that it's so old, it's antiquity, it's been prayed by Christians since the time of Jesus. In fact, they used to pray it three times a day in place of the 18 benedictions in Jewish prayer. That's what we're really going to look at today. We're going to park right there, on those benedictions and we're going to look at the Our Father as sort of springing out of this tradition of Jewish prayer. Those of you who have Jewish roots or maybe you have Jewish people in your family, you probably already know this, but this was actually the suggestion that Father Burton made in his book that the Our Father was not something that Jesus just gave us because the apostles wanted to know how to pray, it was something that he handed on to us from *his* Jewish tradition and I'll show you why.

The catechism actually says that they prayed it three times a day in place of the 18 benedictions in Jewish prayer and that's in catechism #2767 and now the prayer is seven blessings. Remember if you were in the Old Testament series with me you know that seven is the number of divinity and the number of completeness. So, where there were 18 benedictions, now there are seven blessings in the Our Father prayer. So, when you study the biblical texts, according to Father Burton, you see how unique the prayer was to Jesus and it is true that it was first composed by him, and shared with his apostles, and it's distinctive for them. It's a tradition for Millenia that we have prayed this prayer as a church, but there's a good deal of evidence to that the prayer is actually part of this Jewish prayer and that Jesus probably learned it from his parents, from Mary and Joseph. And that makes sense, he is Jewish, His roots are Jewish, all of the tradition of prayer like the Divine Office, all of that springs from the practice of Jewish prayer where they prayed fixed hour prayers and they would go to the synagogue. We have evidence of that, even in the scriptures, where it says, in the book of Acts, that the apostles went to the synagogue for their Hour of Prayer at the 3rd hour or the whatever. And so, we know that they continued the practice of going to the synagogue and praying, or praying the fixed hour prayers privately, from all the way up, because what happened is; our Divine Office sort of sprung out of that so now we continue that practice, and it began with some of the Psalms.

Before Moses there wasn't a liturgical tradition of prayer yet and it wasn't until after the Babylonian and Assyrian captivities that the rabbis collected the prayers in a standardized form and made them something that everybody should pray. So, all of the faithful, pious Jewish people would have prayed those fixed our prayers, preferably facing Jerusalem, facing east toward the temple. The history then, of liturgical prayer, actually began with Moses because he received the instructions for the Tabernacle and the later Temple that was built around that; the permanent Tabernacle. But the prayers that grew up in that liturgical schedule actually centered around the sacrifices and those that were made in that Tabernacle and those that were made in the later Temple, and that's how the liturgical prayer actually came to be, to begin with. So, we know then that the Jewish people prayed the Psalms and particular passages that the rabbis collected and made part of a daily sort of thing but there was also this tradition called benedictions. So, it's indisputable that Jesus prayed the Our Father and he recommended it to us, and we see that in Matthew's and Luke's accounts. But as I said, it seems also that there really was a rich tradition of Jewish prayer behind it, and so the point of contention is really

the source of the prayer. And it looks a whole lot like an abbreviated form of something called the Amidah, not Amida, which is that Celestial Buddha according to the scriptures of Buddhism.

This Amidah is a prayer prayed three times a day by the Jews. I hope I'm saying that properly. It's sometimes called the standing prayer but it's the central prayer of Jewish liturgy. And so, the typical weekday Amidah consists of 19 blessings, although it originally, as I said, it had 18. In fact, the alternative name of the prayer actually means 18. So, when the Amidah is modified for specific prayers, or for specific occasions, the first three blessings and the last three are constant; they kind of frame the Amidah used in each service, and the middle 13 are replaced by blessings specific to the occasion. The Jewish Amidah prayer is prayed standing with feet firmly together preferably while facing Jerusalem. As I said, the Amidah is also known as the 18 benedictions and it has been in existence well before Jesus was born. It's a private prayer recited by Jews silently everyday and then, as I mentioned, in other forms, it's also part of public synagogue services. There are different forms of prayer based on the different times like the festivals, and the weekdays, the Sabbath, different occasions and also on different geographical locations. So, we always have to keep in mind when we're talking about Jesus, that he was a Jewish man, who lived in Palestine in the early part of the first century A.D. And so, it's reasonable to think, as in all of the aspects of Jesus's actions and life, that of course he thought and behaved and prayed as the first Century Jews did. And there is a Biblical scholar named James Charlesworth who says that as Jews, Jesus and his followers inherited those prayers developed by the common folk. They structured their day through those public prayers, they recited them in the morning and in the afternoon and the evening. So, given this background then, let's take a look at the particulars of the Lord's Prayer and break open maybe some of the details and the meaning behind the petitions of the Lord's Prayer.

As I said there are seven blessings now instead of the 18. The first three have to do with God's glory. It starts with the sanctification of his name, the coming up his kingdom, the fulfillment of his will, and those three things have to do with God and His glory. The last four pertain to what we need and to what we want. So, give us our daily bread, forgive us our sins, lead us away from temptation and deliver us from evil. So, you've got give us, forgive us, lead us and deliver us and those have to do with us and our needs. So, those seven blessings, well you're going to see that the origins of the spare are probably Jewish. So, let's go backwards, beginning with the earliest Christian source, outside of the gospels of Matthew and Luke, and then we'll work back in time to see if we can discern a trail of historical evidence.

So, the Our Father prayer appears in ancient Christian texts. The first one is called the Didache. The Didache is like a primitive catechism that was used by early Christians to evangelize gentiles. You can actually look it up online for free and you can read it. It's pretty short, but in it, it talks about the Eucharist, it talks about contraception, it talks about all kind of stuff but it's pretty brief. Like I said, it's like a manual or a primitive catechism. It claims to be a compilation of the teachings of the Apostles and truly if you read through it, you can see that it's all biblical. So, it's like a composite document though made up of parts that come from even older sources than its final form. That form appears to have come together about 150 A.D., but a lot of scholars speculate that parts of it are probably a lot older, and they date it to the late first century. So, this instruction manual was written by Jewish followers of Jesus to help in the conversion of gentiles.

And so, the Didache states the rules for praying the Lord's Prayer. Pray this thus three times a day and that's consistent as we saw, with the Jewish practice of praying the Amidah three times a day. So, it suggests then that early Jewish Christians understood the Lord's Prayer as a type of Amidah, isn't that

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interesting? So moving further back to the Jewish sources well, first of all we have to remember the fact that dating the Amidah is really difficult because it was promulgated by what was called the Great assembly or the synagogue that which was like an assembly of religious rulers that ruled Judaism from the beginning of the second Temple period, about 530 BC until the Maccabees in the second century BC. If that tradition is true, then the prayer could actually be dated as early as the 6th century BC, but its earliest history and the exact dates and all that of the great synagogue, all of that's really disputed by historians. So, it's difficult to date the Amidah. And it's especially difficult because the Talmud, which is the central text for Jewish law and theology, says that no one is allowed to write down the benedictions of the Amidah. So, that explains why finding actual texts of the prayer on ancient papyrus or parchment is almost impossible. There are some that have survived. There are 8 different versions in the Amidah cited in the text of the Talmud and that gives instructions on how to pray it. In one citation it says that the prayer should not be recited as you would read a letter but that you should pray it, saying something new in the daily recitation. I'll show you what I mean here in just a moment.

There seems to not have been an effort by the Jews to standardize this prayer until the late 1st century AD which implies that it's probably a lot older than the time of this final form. But before it was formalized the prayer form of the Amidah was really changeable. It was consistent with the instructions of the Talmud. So, each of the elements could be arranged in a different sequence to sort of make it more spontaneous. It wasn't, the whole point in not writing it down was so that people wouldn't pray it by rote, ok? And so, they could be arranged in a different sequence or they could just be dropped out completely. So, it was not to be recited from memory or read from a written text. It was supposed to be prayed spontaneously from the heart that's why you have 18 of those benedictions, so that you could sort of switch them up. And as I said you could pray them in a different order or you can drop some all together but either way this was a prayer that was supposed to have been prayed three times a day and although the benedictions remained the same they could change up the order and they were meant to, it was meant to be a spontaneous type of prayer. Tertullian and Origen both believed that the Lord's Prayer should never be recited by rote, that it should be like a suggested outline or a form of Prayer. Saint Cyprian who was another church father said that all Christian prayer should be modeled on that Lord's Prayer and that the priest ought to pray spontaneously in the presence of their congregations. So, all of this sounds a lot like the way the ancient Jews understood the way, their praying of their Amidah.

So, when we think about whether Jesus composed this our Father and its petitions, then we have to show evidence for when the words of the prayer were first being prayed. And, if there's no evidence for that, prior to Jesus, then the argument that Jesus composed it is pretty strong. But if there is evidence, well and there is evidence, to support that the prayer was being prayed by Jews before Jesus, not in the exact same format, but very similar, and I'm going to show you that in a moment, but that supports the argument that it was a prayer that was already in circulation before, well at the time, but also before Jesus, because it was something that they were already praying. I'm being redundant but necessarily so because I just want to be clear, okay? We're going to compare now then the parts of the Amidah, the Jewish Amidah, to the Our Father, okay? So, if we have this understanding of Jewish prayer and we have early Christian instructions about how to pray the Our Father then rather than looking for the prayer as we know it in ancient sources we can just look at the parts of the Jewish Amidah compare this to the elements in the Lord's Prayer as well as to Old Testament and other Jewish sources that are similar to those parts, the elements, the benedictions separately.

So, there are six parts of the Amidah that can be isolated, and their history traced. The first is the address of God as father, second is the blessing of his Name, the third is asking for the coming of God's

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kingdom, the fourth is a petition for daily bread, the fifth is their request for conditional forgiveness of sins, and the sixth is begging for deliverance from trial and temptation and already you can see that those six pieces are included in the Our Father. And so, the address of God as father or 'Our Father', was found throughout Judaism. It wasn't new to Jesus. I know that many times we hear that's the case, but it wasn't. It wasn't new to him, it's all through the Old Testament scripture period and Deuteronomy, and Malachi and Psalms and Jeremiah and several other places Tobit, Wisdom, Sirach and there's also some important discoveries from the Dead Sea Scrolls that contain an extra-Biblical psalm and another Jewish prayer, and both of those addressed God as father, okay? So, God is addressed as father in the Jewish prayer, it's called 'A Jewish prayer Our Father and our King'. And of course the name of that prayer is taken from the first line, but that phrase, we find that address in Jewish prayers at the same time outside of Israel as well, but my point then is that it was throughout Judaism and even in ancient paganism, but God is addressed as 'our Father' throughout the Old Testament as I just said, but also in some extra biblical writings. So, we're going to look at other parts of the Amidah prayer and compare those to the Our Father.

So, we left off looking at addressing God as father and how that was done throughout the Old Testament, and also throughout Jewish prayer, and also throughout paganism. So, the term father for God is not a new thing. New, meaning new with the coming of Jesus. So, it was a practice, a Jewish practice in Jewish prayer. The second part was the blessing of God's name which we know as 'hallowed be thy name' so, if it's hallowed or blessed, that is an extremely common prayer in ancient Judaism. If you look in 1st Chronicles, King David blessed the Lord and the sight of the whole assembly in, 29:10. In Daniel, a vision was related to him in a dream and he offered that blessing; "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever for wisdom and power are his', Daniel 2:20. So, almost all the forms of the prayer prayed at the end of a synagogue service, they are called the Kaddish, they all contain blessings for God's name. So, this too is a common Jewish prayer. So that phrase; 'Blessed Be he' after an address of God, is really common in Jewish tradition. And so, when people say - when they talk about him, they say 'blessed be he' after that. In fact, that's just so common there are too many instances to even count.

The third is asking for the coming of God's Kingdom, which we know in the Our father is 'Thy Kingdom Come'. So, praying for the coming of God's kingdom is part of this wider prayer tradition in Judaism that longs for the restoration of the Temple and not only that, but the holy city of Jerusalem. The loss of the holy city and the temple is an ancient hurt, a wound in Judaism that goes back to the Assyrians in the 8th Century BC and the destruction of the temple in the city by the Babylonians in the sixth century, and then the destruction of King Herod's Temple rebuilt by the Romans. That was in the New Testament times about 70 AD. That was actually the end of Judaism completely because that Temple was destroyed. And in fact, there are accounts of, I forget what the guy's name is, Julian, I want to say? But was a guy who decided he was going to rebuild it and some really tragic things happened every single time and they never could do it and I think eventually he died and so the whole attempt was dropped, and it hasn't been attempted since then. But there is a longing in Judaism for this building, for this Temple that continues today. We see that when we go, if you've ever been to the Wailing Wall, or the Western Wall, it's the only piece of the Ancient Temple complex that remains and we see Jewish prayers there praying at the wall, both men and women and so future restoration of that Temple has always been tied, in Jewish thought, with the restoration of God's Kingdom. So, praying for God's kingdom then, is all over Jewish prayer for millennia. In fact, in the Bible itself it says, "Treat Zion kindly according to our goodwill", 'Build up the walls of Jerusalem' - in the Psalms, and again in Tobit; 'Afterward all of them will return from their captivity and they my will rebuild Jerusalem with due honor'. In, this is a non-biblical book, but 2nd Baruch which dates to about 70 A.D. and maybe

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earlier, there is a really long prayer from Baruch asking for God's establishment of his long-awaited kingdom. So, praying for the coming kingdom is all over the older versions of the Amidah. So, for example, from the 14th benediction of the Amidah we find this prayer: "Return in mercy to Jerusalem your city, dwell in it as you have promised. Rebuild it soon and in our days and speedily set up in it the Throne of David." There is clear evidence here, that prayers for the coming of God's kingdom were part of Jewish prayer at the time of Jesus and even long before him and they are still in use today.

Then we have this petition for daily bread, 'give us this day our daily bread' in the Our Father. In most versions of the Jewish Amida the prayer for food is usually found and the 9th benediction and that's a benediction frequently taken out of context of the larger prayer and used as a blessing before the meal by Jewish people. In the Amidah it is a literal prayer for literal food and one of the things that Fr. Burton said in his book was, he believed *that* was the whole point, in what Jesus said there, 'give us this day our daily bread'. But I think, after having studied the words, the Greek words and of course the catechism agrees that it, of course, is a request for food, like literal food. First of all, it's redundant, 'give us this day our daily bread', this day and daily are redundant and so if you look at it in the original language what you see there is that there is a word used its 'epiousios', it means above substance or super substance or hyper essence. It's a word that's not used anywhere else in the whole Bible and in fact it's a really rare word that the church fathers had a really hard time translating because it is so rare. But the catechism, if you think of 'give us this day our Eucharist' then it makes perfect sense because what is super bread? What is super substantial bread or hyper essence bread? Well, it's the Eucharist and so we receive that every day, 'give us this day our Eucharist', but in any case, the root of it probably is from the Jewish Amidah because, as I said, they continue to pray it and sometimes pull it out of the full prayer and use it at meals.

Then there is a request for forgiveness 'and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us' is what it says in 'Our Father'. There is a Jewish version of the Amidah that says, 'Forgive us our Father for we have sinned, pardon us our King for we have transgressed' and of course that's remarkably similar to 'forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us' in the Our Father. The thought that 'forgiveness of our sins' depends on our own forgiveness of those who sin against us, is also in the Old Testament. It says, "Forgive your neighbor the wrong he has done to you then when you pray your own sins will be forgiven." that's in Sirach 38:2. So, that principal is not only in Jewish prayer but also in scriptures and so there are also several ancient rabbinic statements that concern that conditional nature of God's forgiveness and most of them say that if you have mercy on others, then God will have mercy on you. In fact, I believe that's in James as well but Jesus himself said that mercy triumphs over judgment. Well that's in James actually, but *that* mercy is preferable to justice or judgment. So, this rabbinic statement actually says 'He who is merciful to others, mercy is shown to him by heaven. While he who is not merciful to others, mercy is not shown to him by heaven'. So, there is that particular blessing or that prayer in the Amidah as well.

Then the 6th piece asking for deliverance from trial or temptation, 'lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil' it says in our Lord's Prayer. So, this is that particular petition that stirred that controversy when Pope Francis suggested that the phrase 'lead us not into temptation' was mistranslated and it makes sense because God can't sin, so why would you lead us into temptation? I think it's a mistranslation, it's definitely odd, it's kind of strange. In fact, the catechism agrees as well that it's more like 'just don't let us fall into temptation'. And that's what the pope suggested, that a better translation from the Greek to English would be 'do not allow us to fall to temptation, or into temptation'. So, his reasoning was clear, and it was appropriate it seems, according to the catechism too. But this idea of deliverance from temptation is all over ancient sources of Jewish and the Old

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Testament. In the Old Testament we see where in the Psalms especially, the psalmist asks God's protection from evil in several places; 'You will protect them, and those will rejoice in you who love your name'. One of my favorites is Psalm 91. 'He who dwells in the secret place of the, Most High, will abide in the shadow of the Almighty'. That whole Psalm is a Psalm of protection actually, but in my translation that I memorized under, it's probably different than yours, but that's out of psalm 91:1. As I said, that whole psalm is a plea for protection. But elsewhere, all through the Psalms, God is called a shield, a rock, a refuge, a deliver, and the book of Sirach also says, "No evil can harm the one who fears the Lord through trials, again and again he is there." that's in Sirach 33:1.

There are also non-biblical Jewish prayers written prior to 100 BC that asked God to guide people through temptations and evils. In a non-biblical book called The Book of Jubilees which is probably written around 100 BC, we find these particular prayers. They ask God to guide the people through evil and temptation so, for example, in a prayer of Noah from that book of jubilees, Noah asks God to protect his sons. He says, 'Let Your grace be lifted up on my sons and do not let the evil spirits rule over them and let them not rule over the spirits of the living, and do not let them have power over the children of the righteous'. So, asking God to save or keep us from trial, from temptations is common, it's a common thing in those Jewish prayers and those early rabbinic literature and even today. So, one of those, I don't know if you know what the Shema is, but "Hear o Israel, God is one." I don't know it well enough to quote it, but you've probably heard of that. The second prayer says, 'Drive away the evil one from before and behind us.' and that's a great way to complete this segment.

All right we've been looking at parts of Jewish prayers and connecting them with the elements of the Amidah and comparing those the elements of Our Father, the Our Father prayer. So, now I'd just like to kind of look at whole Jewish prayers that resemble our Lord's Prayer so, just keep in mind, remember the difficulty in dating these prayers. I'd like to look at some kind of really ancient examples. First of all, there's that Jewish prayer called the Kaddish, and as I mentioned earlier this prayer is prayed and parts of the Liturgy of the synagogue. Commonly that word Kaddish is used to refer to a particular prayer prayed by mourners at a funeral or after burial. There is a, it's different word but there's a similar word in the Old Testament for the land of Canaan, or Palestine, or Israel; Kadesh-Barnea and that term is usually used to mean the plain, the beautiful parts, not the desert, but anyway the Kaddish in Jewish prayer is from the evening services for the Sabbath and for festivals and it almost reads like a shortened version of our Lord's Prayer. It says, "Magnified and Sanctified be his great name in the world that he has created according to his will. May he establish his kingdom in your lifetime and in your days and in the lifetime of all the house of Israel, even speedily and at a near time." Here's another form of it, it's called the half Kaddish. It also resembles the Lord's Prayer. It's almost exactly the same, honestly, as the other but it's a little different. "Exalted and hallowed be his great name in the world which he created according to his will, may he establish His Kingdom in your lifetime and in your days and in the lifetime of the whole household of Israel, speedily and at a near time." So, the Talmud tells Jewish people that in times of danger or emergency, when they can't pray the full Amidah, they are allowed to pray a shortened prayer, a shortened form. And so, a lot of times rabbis would teach that kind of abbreviated version to their students and so, this abbreviated Amidah, the one that's used for the Sabbath, reads "Grant us relief for you are our Father and reign you over us speedily, for you are our King."

So, remember that Jesus then was familiar with these kinds of prayers and so, when you think about the scenes in the gospels of Matthew and Luke where Jesus is asking his followers to pray this prayer, the one we now know as the Our Father, that is prayed all the time. Remember that there are actually even two versions of that prayer. There's two settings and two scenes where Jesus prayed it. In

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Matthew's gospel you see, in the beginning of chapter 5, that Jesus begins this lengthy teaching of the crowds and it's that Sermon on the Mount. And so, this part of the Gospel includes his presentation on the Beatitudes, these teachings on the law, on anger, on adultery, divorce and then early in chapter 6 he begins teaching on prayer and he offers this instruction, he says; "Don't be like the hypocrites who loves the stand and pray in the synagogues and street corners, so that others see them." He says, "Do not babble like the pagans who think that they will be heard because of their many words." So, maybe Jesus is teaching here like the rabbi's, telling his Jewish crowd not to memorize their prayers but to keep them spontaneous. Isn't that an interesting thought?

So, then he goes into this prayer, he introduces what we now know as the Our father. He simply just says this is how you pray. Note though, that he doesn't say, "Say exactly this or pray these particular words." This is consistent with what we've learned so far about this Jewish tradition of prayer, that it should be spontaneous. So, they had specific elements that didn't change, but they could either be swapped up and said in a different order, or they could be dropped all-together and they were prayed at, certain parts of the benedictions were prayed at certain instances. We saw that one was prayed as a blessing over a meal, see? So, the suggestion then that father Burton offered is that, well we can't say what Jesus doesn't say, but it is important to maybe just think about the fact that maybe he's not telling us the specific words to pray. But simply giving us a form to follow. Maybe he's just telling them how to prayer, not necessarily what words to recite. And I think that was a really great suggestion and I have thought about it a lot. Now that's not to say that we shouldn't pray this prayer and that we shouldn't recite it with our rosaries or we shouldn't pray it in the Mass, or whatever. It's always been done that way so, we're safe on that. But it does actually seem to give us more permission to pray those spontaneous prayers and if you're not comfortable with that then you should maybe try it. Just talk to God like you would talk to a person who's sitting in front of you. So, the introduction then to the Our Father prayer in Luke's gospel is a little bit different.

Jesus was praying alone in a certain place, it says, and when he was finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord teach us to pray as John taught his disciples." Now that resembles this common practice of rabbinic figures, or rabbis teaching their students, and their followers particular abbreviated versions of the Amidah. So, then Jesus gives the disciples the prayer and then without even commenting, he goes on to explain what their attitude of prayer should be. And so, in order to do it he uses the parable of the friend who comes at midnight to ask for bread for an unexpected visitor and it's interesting, I think, in that account in Luke 11 that there's no reaction by Jesus' disciples to the prayer that Jesus had just told them to pray. I mean, again it's risky to argue from their silence but if you look at the scene and you think of the, that the reaction of the disciples is not even mentioned, because maybe they just shrugged their shoulders when Jesus gave them the prayer and were probably thinking really, is that it, you know? The prayer you gave us is to pair we already pray 3 times a day, we were hoping for something special. We've been praying that prayer since we were kids. That's consistent too with the tone of Luke 11 where he says, "If an earthly father already knows how to respond to requests from his children, surely our Father knows how to give us what we need." So, the point then is, it seems, that Jesus is telling his disciples not to make such a big deal out of the particular words of prayer. And that's really the whole point, that's really where we've been going through all of this looking at the Jewish Amidah, and I think it is important to at least think about it, because I think is Catholic sometimes we really do get hung up on saying things exactly right and probably here, you know, it's really not that big a deal. I certainly believe that that's how God probably prefers us to approach him - spontaneously.

Now is it good to have liturgical prayers? Of course, it is because a lot of times, you know, we can't pray. We don't have the words or we're too hurt or confused or whatever. Maybe we have no idea how we should pray. And those times the fixed prayers are not only convenient, but they are appropriate because they help us pray when we don't feel like we can pray. But I wanted to kind of just look at the Lord's Prayer really carefully, because it seems to me that understanding what Jesus was saying about prayer is really, really important. How we pray tells us a lot about how we think of God and how we see ourselves in relation to him. And so, the Our Father, even the catechism says, it encapsulates so much of what Jesus thought about God and what he wanted to teach us about God our Father.

So, there's a good possibility that the Our Father prayer that we have been praying for 2000 years is indeed an abbreviated Amidah, a Jewish prayer. That would have meant then that it was already known and prayed by Jesus and by his first followers, it was familiar. Maybe Jesus knew they were looking for something special, some prayer that was more extravagant, or peculiar, or maybe just unique to him and his followers. But maybe he just surprised them by telling them to just give him the prayer they already knew, and the one that they have been praying 3 times a day for their whole lives. And, if this is true, then it tells us a lot about Jesus's own religious belief and practice. I mean you know, like I said, my mom was, well I did too, I remember having the misconception that Jesus was white. You know until I realize one day that he would have been an Arab. I actually work for a man in high school I waited table at his restaurant and his name was Iraj and he was from Iran, Iraq in that area and it was during the time of the Gulf War and I had the Arabs on my mind a lot, right? And I knew Iraj and he was such a good man, a good person, such a good boss and it just occurred to me one day as I was waiting table, "Oh my gosh, Jesus came from that land! He would have look like him!" You know? He would have been more dark-skinned. He would have been an Arab. So yes, we have to remember always when we are reading these stories and trying to understand the Bible. We have to try to understand that these people had a particular Jewish history. They had a particular Jewish practice and it's important to know what those practices were, because if it's true, and it is, that Jesus was Jewish and his thinking about God was shaped by that Jewish faith. This is a faith that he learned from his parents and those around him. So, seeing that religious heritage in the Lord's Prayer, that prayer he asked us to pray makes it so clear that he's inviting us into a faith of his own roots. So, he takes what is familiar and he gives it to us afresh and anew. In the name of the father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.