

Knowing God our Compassionate Father

Christian creeds address God as “the Father, the almighty.” God’s fatherhood is a clear hallmark of Jesus’ life and prayer. Frequently, Jesus prays to his *Abba*. He calls God “my Father” (Mt 11:26; Lk 10:21). His mission is from the Father (Jn 11:41-42). During the last supper he addresses his Father (Jn 17:1, 5, 11, 21, 24, 25). Jesus turned to his *Abba* in the crisis moments of his life: Gethsemane (Mk 14:36; Mt 26:42), Calvary (Lk 23:34). His dying words are: “Father, into your hands I commend by spirit” (Lk 23:46).

Because Jesus the Lord taught this prayer to his disciples, it is known as the “Lord’s Prayer.” Tertullian called it “the summary of the whole Gospel,” and Saint Thomas Aquinas said it is “the most perfect of all prayers.” When we Christians in faith express our needs to our Father, we are also committing ourselves to making our prayer requests a reality. For example, praying for our daily bread means doing our part and sharing in the Church’s mission to relieve hunger and deprivation in the world.

In a unique way, Pope Francis, the “pope of mercy,” has focused the Church’s mission on the theme of mercy. Recall his document, *Misericordiae Vultus (The Face of Mercy)*, wherein he proclaimed an entire year of mercy. Francis says: “We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace.... Mercy [is] the bridge that connects God and man” (MV 2).

For Pope Francis, God the Father’s mercy is central to the Church’s life and mission. “All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy” (MV 10). “Wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy” (MV 12).