

Tuesday of the First Week of Lent

February 23, 2021

By Jonathan Kadjeski

Achievement Plus Student Success Counselor

“Our Father who art in heaven”

We’ve all skipped it. The foreword, the introduction, the preface, the overture. Though referred to as the preface, the first verse of the Lord’s Prayer is, I think, best characterized as an overture. Listen to an overture and you hear all the themes and motifs of the opera, musical, or film score that will follow. This one-verse overture prefaces the prayer that itself is the pattern by which we are to model all other prayers.

I cannot help but begin with a close reading, and in this time replete with challenges to our very sense of community, I am awestruck at the power of the first word: Our. Our is plural. Prayers are plural. As one Church, we pray. We pray together because our prayers are always for the collective we. The first-person plural pronouns drive this prayer: Our and us. This prayer models the Holy Father’s call for a “new Nehemiah project” in his book *Let Us Dream*, published at the end of last year. After the Babylonian exile, Ezra led the restoration of the Temple and the Law in Jerusalem while Nehemiah focused on a different restoration, the rebuilding of the city’s walls. He strove to rebuild a beloved community, just as we must do today.

The grammar of prayer reminds us that we are never alone in our prayer. The disciples wanted to pray, but they did not know how. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his short and powerful book *Psalms*, writes that Jesus “wants to pray with us and to have us pray with him.” As we pray the Psalter, we pray with Christ. We are struck by the apparent repetitions; if a musical composition, we might subtitle the Psalter “Variations on the Theme of Our Father.” We pray together through the love of God’s word, Emmanuel, God with us. Prayer is plural.