

## THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

*Lesson 4 – Study Questions*

*Matthew 6:1-34*

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**Review:** *From your experience at the Cornerstone meeting last week, share something that helped build your faith.*

*“If anyone will piously and soberly consider the sermon which our Lord Jesus Christ spoke on the mount, as we read it in the Gospel according to Matthew, I think that he will find in it, so far as regards the highest morals, a perfect standard of the Christian life.” St. Augustine*

**NOTE:** Today’s lesson includes the third part of the Sermon on the Mount, and begins with Jesus instructing in three aspects of piety, sometimes referred to as interior penance, and including: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. The section on prayer includes the text of the Lord’s prayer and a teaching on forgiveness of sins...The three acts of piety were important aspects of Jewish religious life in Jesus’ time. *Navarre Bible*

### DAY ONE

Read Matthew 6:1-8

1. Chapter 6 begins with an introductory statement of principle which applies to all of the concepts on which Jesus will instruct in this chapter. In verses 2-4, Jesus instructs his listeners to do the right thing in almsgiving for the right reasons, rather than to impress others. What phrase or phrases from these verses define the correct motivation?

**NOTE:** When the Pharisees wanted to give something to the poor, it was their custom to go down to a busy street corner in Jerusalem and blow a trumpet. Although the purpose was to call the poor and needy together to receive the gifts, it afforded a fine opportunity to let others see their good works. *Traditional Catechism, Matthew 6: The Externals of Religion*

2. Jesus changes topics, this time to prayer. In verse 5, Jesus berates the actions of hypocrites who pray where they can be seen; and yet, Jesus also said we should “let our light shine before others” (5:16). What must we do to be sure we “shine” without simply seeking the spotlight?

3. Record verse 6 (Good memory verse) and take a moment to consider whether Jesus is describing a physical or a spiritual “inner room.” Do you have a special place set aside for prayer or spending time with God while doing your Cornerstone lesson?

**NOTE:** Jesus in his own life often went apart to pray on his own (see [Matthew 14:23](#); [Mark 6:46-47](#); [John 6:15](#)) as well as praying with others. “A soul who really puts his Christian faith into practice realizes that he needs frequently to get away and pray alone to his Father God; however, the Second Vatican Council also reminds us that the Christian is indeed called to pray in the liturgy with others.” *Navarre*

4. In verse 7-8, Jesus criticizes the pagans for “babbling.” Pagans of his time thought that the more they said, the better chance that God would answer their prayers. Look up the definition of babbling. What does babbling in prayer indicate to you?

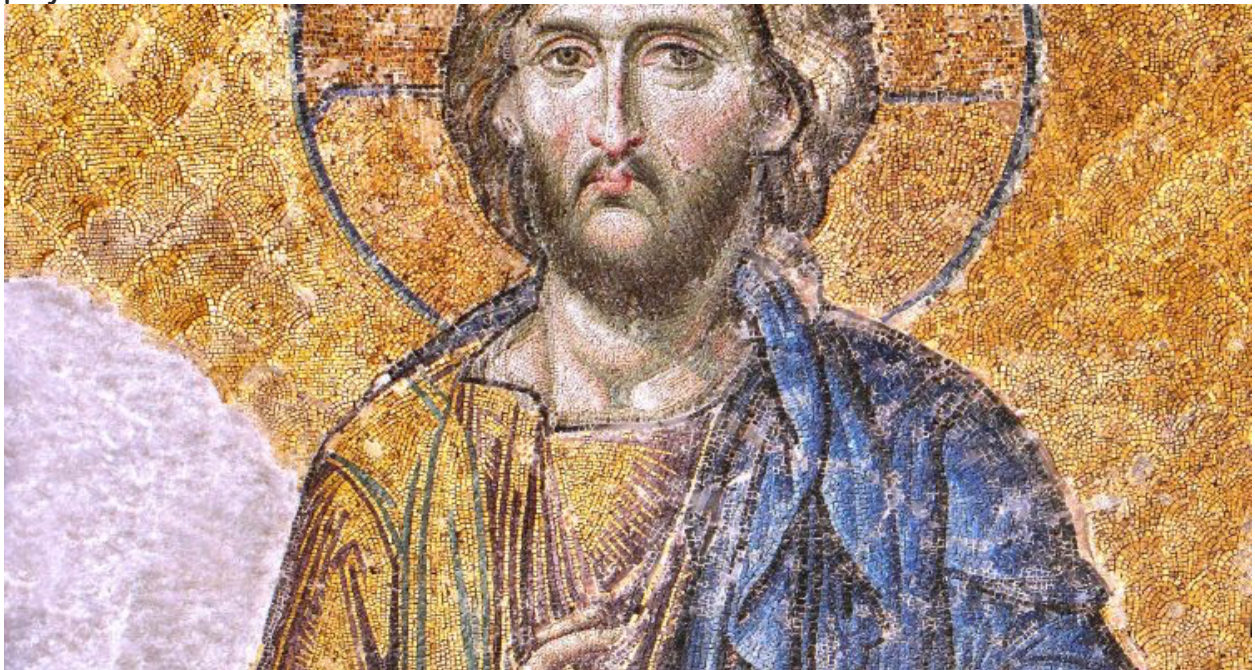
5. CONNECTION: The USCCB says: “... prayer is not merely an exchange of words, but it engages the whole person in a relationship with God the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit.” What is your understanding of the reason for the various postures and gestures (bowing, genuflecting, sitting, standing, kneeling, singing) we use during the celebration of the Mass or during prayer?

Read and record [Psalm 95:6](#) and offer a silent prayer of thanksgiving to our listening God.

## **DAY TWO**

**Read Matthew 6:9-15**

**NOTE:** Before you begin today’s lesson, take a moment to pray the Our Father, as you learned to pray it.



**Christ Pantocrator, Hagia Sofia, 537 CE**

6. Jesus taught us how to pray by sharing the Lord's Prayer also known as the "Our Father." Read also the version as recorded in Luke 11:2-4. Note something that differs between the prayer in Matthew and in Luke.

7. The word "hallowed" means holy or consecrated. In what ways do you address God in order to hallow his name?

8. Matthew's recording of the Lord's Prayer begins with the invocation "Our Father" followed by seven petitions: three directed to God and four directed to our needs. Among the petitions for our needs, we ask, "Give us this day our daily bread." What types of nourishment could "bread" represent?

9. We are familiar with verse 12, in which we are told to forgive those in debt to us as we continue to be forgiven by the Father; however, verse 13 poses a less generally understood petition "do not subject us to the final test" which we pray as "lead us not into temptation." Read and record James 1:13-14.

**NOTE: We must turn to God to get the strength we need to resist the temptation to sin; and through the work of the Holy Spirit to fight the battle against sin in order to live the victory of a holy life. Such a battle and such a victory are only possible if we remain vigilant, if we remain obedient, and if we are strengthened through prayer and the sacraments Jesus gave to his Church. *Agape***

10. CONNECTION: While verses 14-15 center on forgiveness, forgiving isn't always easy. To forgive does not mean that we must excuse whatever behavior caused the hurt, but it does mean that we allow ourselves to let go of an injustice or hurt that is taking up space in our hearts. What helps you to forgive past hurts and move forward in love?

Read and record Ephesians 4:32 and write a prayer today asking that you may learn to let go and forgive.

### DAY THREE

#### Read Matthew 6:16-24

11. In verses 16-18, Jesus tells us to fast with joy as the third of the traditional works of mercy about which he sermonizes, along with almsgiving and prayer.

We may limit our fasting primarily to Fridays during Lent; however, fasting at any time can allow us to focus more of our attention on God. What do you perceive the benefits of fasting to be?

**NOTE:** Fasting is a prayer practice that involves denying yourself something in order to increase your spiritual awareness, strengthen a commitment, or petition God for something you or another person really needs. Fasting is also about detachment - separating yourself from something that you have become overly attached to. It's a way of reclaiming your spiritual strength and regaining some balance in your life. Practicing some denial of our wants and needs in small ways can help us grow in self-discipline and the ability to put off momentary comfort for a larger, more important goal. *DynamicCatholic.com, A Guide to Catholic Fasting*

12. The last sentences of verses 16 and 18 refer to rewards from the Father. Choose one of these sentences and comment on what you think Jesus may have been indicating about the consequences of the actions of the hypocrites versus those of the faithful.

13. Verses 19-21 are dedicated to "Treasure on Earth" (in NRSVCE, "Treasures of the Heart") in which Jesus counsels us not to value material things in the same way we focus our hearts on the Word and works for God. Read and record verse 21 (Good memory verse).

14. Jesus continues teaching by warning us that the eye is the "lamp of the body." Carefully read this section contrasting the importance of seeing God's light and avoiding the darkness of sin. What are ways we can be "filled with light" and shine before others, as Jesus asks of us?

15. CONNECTION: In Matthew 6:24 Jesus reprises his teachings from verses 19-21 with a different image, that of love of mammon (earthly treasures) versus treasures in heaven. How does Jesus' warning, "No one can serve two masters," speak to how you set your own priorities and commitments?

Read and record Colossians 3:23-24 and write a prayer today reaffirming your love and devotion to the word and work of Jesus Christ.

**NOTE:** Notice that throughout the section beginning with verse 19 Jesus presents several contrasts: earth and heaven, light and darkness, love and hate, leading us to understand that we have choices to make in life which will bring us either closer or further away from God. The purpose is calling on us to trust in God's providence.

#### **DAY FOUR**

**Read Matthew 6:25-29**

16. As the last section of chapter 6 begins, Jesus acknowledges that man has physical needs but reminds the disciples to trust in the Lord, calling to mind his care for all things in nature. Why do you think he spends time focusing on food and clothes?

17. Read and record the beautiful and familiar words in verse 26. (Good memory verse)

18. Verse 27 asks one of the most important questions in the Bible, "Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span?" How are you able to put your anxieties aside and not let your worries take too much control of your thoughts?

19. We could entitle the next verses simply "Stop Worrying!" Look up one or more of the verses below to pray when you become anxious.

Psalm 55:23 (55:22 NRSVCE)

Isaiah 41:10

Philippians 4:6-7

20. CONNECTION: "Jesus tells us to focus on furthering God's project of righteousness and justice in the world and to leave God not only the fulfillment of our needs but even the determination of what our needs really are." (Perrotta, Kevin, *Matthew, 6 Weeks with the Bible*) To really "let go and let God" direct our decision making is a challenge. How do you address that challenge in the choices you make?

Read and record Proverbs 3:5-6 and pray for wise counsel.

## **DAY FIVE**

### **Read Matthew 6:30-34**

21. After reading verse 30, share what you think Jesus may have been trying to tell us by choosing “grass of the field” as an example of God’s love and concern.

22. Grass is mentioned many times throughout the bible, beginning with Genesis through the New Testament, often representing the brevity of human life. Choose and record one or more of the following verses.

Psalms 103:15-16

Isaiah 40:6-8

1 Peter 1:24-25

23. Jesus’ words at the end of verse 30 may seem harsh as he says to his listeners, “O you of little faith,” but scholars have noted that these can be words of persuasion or encouragement. Do you have a favorite prayer or hymn that you turn to when you are worried?

24. Read verses 32-34 and note that Jesus tells us to not be anxious because our Heavenly Father will provide for us. Briefly summarize what we should do instead.

25. CONNECTION: It is difficult to think of the people who live in dire necessity putting aside their anxiety. Our neighbors living day-to-day or any of us may experience anxiety related to serious health concerns, emotional or situational stress. Jesus is our example of fully living in the present with total trust in God. How can we heed Jesus’ teaching about not worrying and still make sensible choices in providing for ourselves and our families?

Read and record Philippians 4:19 and begin your prayer today asking for strength to put aside anxiety and to seek God’s kingdom as Jesus has commanded us.

### FINAL QUESTION for the WEEK

Reflect on the past week and consider “charting” two or three days and note the times when you were praying, reading Scripture, serving others, or thinking about God. Are you surprised at the amount of time you spend walking with God on a daily basis? How does this compare with the amount of time spent on other endeavors?

Read pages 41-47 in the *New Collegeville Bible Commentary: The Gospel According to Matthew* by Barbara E. Reid, O.P. The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study acknowledges that scripture quotations in this study are from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE) ©2010, 1991, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.

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