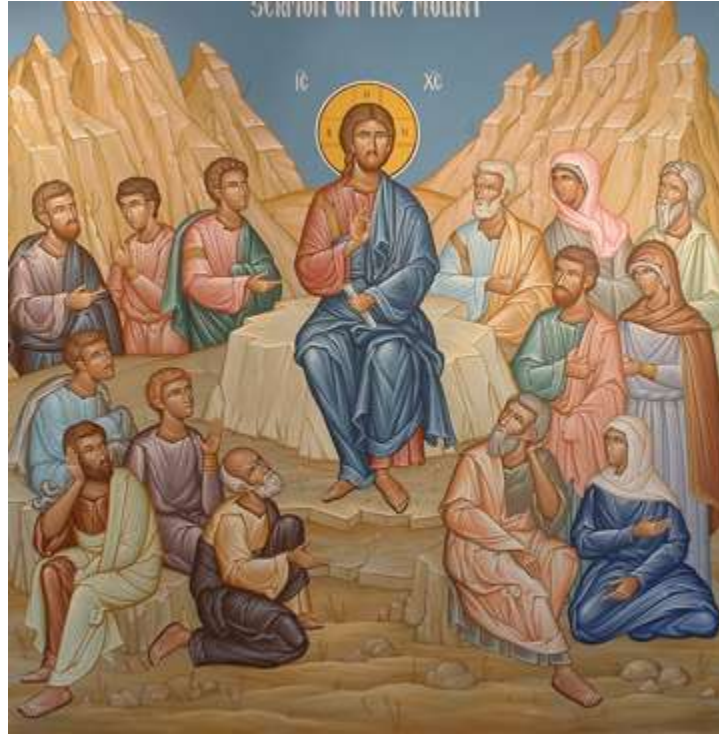


## A Short explanation and a comparison of the Our Father and Prayer of St Ephrem

This teaching was originally in a letter written to a prisoner, who asked about the prayer of St Ephrem. To explain that prayer, it is very useful to compare it to the “Our Father”, so I wrote a little about both prayers. To learn how to say the prayer of St Ephrem at church and at home, see: <http://www.orthodox.net/greatlent/o-lord-and-master-of-my-life-prayer-of-st-ephrem-01.html>. It is also in [DOC](#) or [PDF](#) format.

### *A Short explanation of the Our Father*



The Sermon on the Mount

The Lord spoke the “Our Father” when his disciples asked him: “Lord teach us to pray”. He answered “Pray in this way...”, and then spoke the Our Father. We can understand Jesus’ instructions in two compatible ways. One way is to say the prayer, literally, word for word. Christians have done this since the beginning. The other way is to say our prayers in the manner of the Our Father, emulating its “spirit”. Almost all of our prayers follow the pattern of the Our Father in some way.

**Our Father, Who art in the Heavens, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.**

(The doxology is said by the priest) **For Thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory: of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.**

All these things are present in the “Our Father”:

- Our relationship with God is as a child who has a loving Father. We are fearfully and wonderfully made, in the image of God, and because of this, we should act in a certain way, as children of God. We have responsibilities. (“**Our Father**”)
- We acknowledge the purity and transcendence of God in our prayers, if not explicitly in words, then always in our “approach” to God (Our Father ... **Who art in the heavens**”)

- Our prayers praise God and acknowledge His holiness (“**hallowed be Thy Name**”)
  - Christians are always thinking about spiritual things and eternal life. All that matters in this life is that we prepare for the next life. Everything we do and say and value should be towards this end. Many of our prayers have this spirit “Our Father.... **Thy Kingdom come**”)
  - Our prayers often acknowledge God’s authority over us, and promising Him to struggle to obey Him, and begging His help for this (Our Father... “**Thy Will be done, on Earth as it is on heaven**”)
  - We ask God for the things we need, and trust in His love and providence. We do not ask for more than we need, or frivolous things. (Our Father... “**Give us this day our daily bread**”)
  - We cannot be Christians if we do not forgive. We are not like God, or worthy to be his children if we do not forgive. Forgiveness is paramount, it is a necessity, and we must forgive. We must connect our forgiveness from God with our willingness to forgive others. Jesus made this connection several times (Our Father... “**And forgive us our debts (sins), as we forgive our debtors (those who sin against us)**”)
  - We beg God for help in EVERYTHING. We can do nothing without God. Jesus’ teachings made this VERY clear. Our prayers acknowledge, simultaneously, our weakness, sins and God’s power and willingness to help us in anything (Our Father... “**And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one**”) Note: “Lead us not” is a figure of speech. We do not believe that God would ever cause us to be tempted into ANY sin. The figure of speech is actually saying in a poetic way “Help us not to sin, keep us from sin (we cannot avoid sin without Thee)”
  - Most of our prayers end with a DOXOLOGY. This is a theological hymn of praise. It is more than just “Praise God”, or “Thank you Jesus”. There is grandeur and dogma in the words. We are always aware that God is a Trinity of persons, one in essence, because He has revealed Himself to us. (Our Father... “**For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the power, and the glory, of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.**”
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### *A Short explanation of the Prayer of St Ephrem*



The **Prayer of St Ephrem** is a prayer that we say literally, word for word, and we derive great benefit from it. It is also a pattern, and many of our prayers are similar to it. In these two ways, it is very much like the “Our Father”.

As a pattern for prayer, the Prayer of St Ephrem is a humble acknowledgment of our weakness and sin, and a humble plea for God to help us. It also shares with the “Our Father” a plea to be helped in forgiving our brother. This is not possible unless we see our failings, since the man who does not know himself will inevitably judge others for sins he himself commits, and contains a doxology.

As a verbatim prayer, it mentions some of the worst and more prevalent sins, that almost all of us commit, and some of the greatest virtues, of which we lack. It is not meant to be comprehensive, and list all sins and virtues, but it still covers most of them.



The Prayer of St Ephrem, being said during Presanctified Liturgy, at St. Nicholas Orthodox Church.

**“O Lord and Master of my life, a spirit of idleness, despondency, ambition, and idle talking give me not. “**

***Idleness*** – Anything we do that is not according to our purpose in life and in obedience to the commandments is idleness. This is more than laying around, watching TV and eating potato chips all afternoon. It is more about having bad values and bad priorities, bad thoughts, and pursuing things that are temporary and ultimately worthless, such as riches, ego gratification, entertainment, etc. We are called by the Apostle Paul to “pray without ceasing”, so, literally any moment when we are not praying or “prayerful” and focused on God is idleness. Obviously, it is VERY hard to avoid ALL idleness, but we must try!

***Despondency***. – This is not sadness or depression Despondency is when we have weak faith and do not believe in God fully, completely without reservation. If you examine your life carefully, you will find this sin, as will every man, except for the perfect.

***Ambition*** - Ambition is when we want to follow our own will and not God’s will for us. It is disobedience. It is not a sin to have an ambition to do good, because this is always God’s will for us. It is a sin to put our perceived needs and desires over God. This is akin to idolatry.

***Idle talking*** - This sin is more than saying silly things. It is dirty jokes, and gossip and lying and saying unspiritual or toxic things to people.

**“But rather a spirit of chastity, humble-mindedness, patience, and love bestow upon me Thy servant.**

**“Prostration.**

**Chastity.** This is basically “self-control” and purity in all things. It is temperance. It includes of course, to be chaste sexually, which does not mean to not have sexual relations, but to engage in them in a godly way, on the marriage bed, between a married man and woman, only. All other sexual relations is fornication, and it is sin. Do not make the mistake that this virtue is only about sex. Self-control encompasses all of our life, or sexuality being part of our life.

**Humble-mindedness.** - Our humility must spring out of our self-knowledge of our sins and weaknesses, and God’s transcendent goodness and authority, and His love for us, even though we are sinners. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall see God”.

**Patience.** - This virtue is very much related to the last one mentioned, love. Patience is borne out of prayer, and love and self-control. It is also related to the virtue meekness, which is basically relying on God for everything, and accepting everything in our life as being under his providence – sickness, being slandered or persecuted, sickness, prison – everything.

**Love.** - “God is love.” If we love as God loves, we fulfill the Greatest commandment, and the one that is like it. It is the summit of the virtues, and most of the virtues are because of love. It is important to know also that God is light, and Jesus is the truth the way and the light. We never separate love from truth. Anything without truth cannot be love, not matter how “nice” and “kind” it appears. Discernment to know the truth and act on it with love is beyond our abilities, but God helps us in all things.

**“Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my failings and not condemn my brother; for blessed art, Thou unto the ages of ages. Amen. “**

I think I have written about this part enough. If you say this prayer, with prostrations, it will get into your soul! I have quoted a lot of sculpture, or made allusion to it. I do not have the time right now to footnote these quotes and allusions. I hope you look up these quotes and allusions.

This document is at: [http://www.orthodox.net/catechism/prayers-of-the-church\\_2017+short-explanation-of-our-father-and-prayer-of-saint-ephrem.doc](http://www.orthodox.net/catechism/prayers-of-the-church_2017+short-explanation-of-our-father-and-prayer-of-saint-ephrem.doc)

[http://www.orthodox.net/catechism/prayers-of-the-church\\_2017+short-explanation-of-our-father-and-prayer-of-saint-ephrem.pdf](http://www.orthodox.net/catechism/prayers-of-the-church_2017+short-explanation-of-our-father-and-prayer-of-saint-ephrem.pdf)