

The Hidden Life of the Kingdom

Matthew 6–7 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover that the second half of the Sermon moves from the heart's battles to the heart's habits: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting done for the Father who sees in secret; the Our Father as the pattern of all Christian prayer; trust in providence against anxiety; and the Sermon's sobering ending, where everything comes down to hearing these words and doing them.

Catholic Touchstone. The three pillars of the interior life that the Church sets before us every Lent, the Our Father as “the summary of the whole Gospel,” and an honest answer to the claim that repeated Catholic prayer is the “vain repetition” Jesus condemned.

What You Need to Know

Matthew 6 opens with a warning about practicing piety “before men in order to be seen by them,” which can sound like a contradiction of 5:16, where Jesus commanded that our light shine before men. The resolution is the aim: in chapter 5 the works are seen and the Father gets the glory; in chapter 6 the works are performed so that we get the glory. The audience of the heart is everything. Jesus then takes the three great acts of Jewish piety, almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, and does not abolish a single one. He says “when you give,” “when you pray,” “when you fast,” never “if.” He assumes his disciples will do all three and redirects each toward the Father who sees in secret. These are the three practices the Church hands us every Lent, and they are already named together in the Old Testament: Raphael's farewell speech in Tobit 12:8 commends prayer with fasting and almsgiving as the shape of a righteous life. For many participants this will be their first meeting with Tobit; receive it as a gift, not a debate point, though it is worth knowing that Tobit is one of the seven books found in Catholic Bibles and the Church has treasured it since the early centuries and definitively affirmed it as Scripture in her canon.

At the center of the chapter, and nearly at the mathematical center of the whole Sermon, Jesus gives his disciples a prayer. The Our Father contains seven petitions: the first three reach toward God (his name, his kingdom, his will), the last four carry our needs (bread, forgiveness, protection in trial, deliverance from evil). The Church has prayed it from the earliest days; the Didache already directs Christians to pray it three times daily, and it has held an honored place in the Eucharistic liturgy since the early centuries. One word in it is a genuine mystery: *epiousios*, translated “daily” bread, appears essentially nowhere else in all of Greek literature. Its most literal sense is something like “super-essential,” and St. Jerome rendered it “supersubstantial” in his Latin translation at this verse. The Church hears in it every level at once: real bread for today, God's word, and the Bread of Life. Hold the Eucharistic overtone gently; it is a resonance the tradition treasures, not a proof text.

The teaching on treasure, the sound eye, and the two masters (6:19–24) leads into the Sermon's most beloved passage on anxiety (6:25–34). The logic is a father's logic: look at the birds, consider the lilies; if

the Father feeds and clothes them, will he not much more care for you? The command is not to stop planning but to stop being mastered by worry, and the anchor is 6:33, seek first the kingdom.

Chapter 7 gathers the Sermon's closing counsels: the command against judging (7:1–5), which forbids condemning hearts rather than discerning behavior, since verse 5 still expects us to help remove the speck once our own log is out; the Father's readiness to give good things to those who ask (7:7–11); the Golden Rule as the Law and the Prophets in one sentence (7:12); and then the great warnings: the narrow gate, false prophets known by fruits, and the terrifying “I never knew you” of 7:21–23, where saying “Lord, Lord” and even working wonders does not substitute for doing the Father's will. The Sermon ends with the two builders: everyone who hears these words and does them builds on rock. Matthew closes by noting the crowds' astonishment: he taught as one who had authority. They heard exactly what the group discovered last week.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Tobit 12:8.** Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving named together as the shape of righteousness; Jesus takes up all three and interiorizes them.
- **Exodus 16:4, 16–21.** The manna given daily, enough for each day and no more; the school of daily bread behind the fourth petition.
- **1 Kings 10:4–7; 2 Chronicles 9:22.** Solomon's legendary splendor, surpassed, Jesus says, by a wildflower the Father dresses.
- **Psalms 136.** A single refrain repeated twenty-six times, held in reserve for tonight's steelman.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Cyprian of Carthage (On the Lord's Prayer)

Cyprian marvels that we dare to call God Father only because the Son has authorized the words: what could God refuse to those who pray in his Son's own prayer? He notes too that every pronoun is plural, our Father, our bread, our trespasses: the prayer of Christians is never a private possession but the voice of the whole Church.

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (Letter to Proba, on Prayer)

Augustine tells the widow Proba that whatever words we pray, if we are praying rightly, we are saying nothing that is not already contained in the Lord's Prayer. It is the measure of all Christian prayer: run through its petitions, he says, and you will find every legitimate desire of the heart gathered there.

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew)

On almsgiving in secret, Chrysostom says the Father's seeing is the whole reward worth having: the applause of men is paid in full on the spot and is worth exactly what it costs, while what is done for the Father's eyes alone is stored where no moth or thief can reach it.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1434.** The interior penance of the Christian is expressed above all in three forms: fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, which express conversion toward God, oneself, and others.
- **CCC 2761, 2763. The Lord's Prayer is truly the summary of the whole Gospel (2761); St. Thomas Aquinas calls it the most perfect of prayers (2763).**
- **CCC 2837.** “Daily” (epiousios) is heard on several levels: in its temporal sense it teaches trust in the Father for this day's needs, in its qualitative sense it means the bread necessary for life, and taken literally (“super-essential”) it refers directly to the Bread of Life received in the Eucharist; the petition reaches every level of our dependence on the Father.
- **CCC 2608–2615.** In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus teaches conversion of heart as the ground of prayer, filial trust in the Father, and bold, persevering petition.

Thread Watch

- **Emmanuel thread (develop).** A new note tonight: the Father “who sees in secret” and “knows what you need before you ask.” God-with-us is not only beside his people but attentive to their hidden life. Presence is becoming intimacy.
- **Fulfillment thread (develop).** The Golden Rule: “this is the law and the prophets” (7:12), the same pair Jesus came not to abolish but to fulfil (5:17). The Sermon closes its own frame.
- **Doing-the-word thread (plant, quietly).** The Sermon ends on hearing AND doing (7:21–27). Do not resolve it; this note returns fortissimo when we reach the judgment scene of Matthew 25 in Session 12.

Session Goals

1. Participants can explain how 6:1 and 5:16 fit together: same works, different audience of the heart.
2. Participants discover the three pillars named together in Tobit and understand almsgiving, prayer, and fasting as assumed, not optional, in Jesus' teaching.
3. Participants can walk through the seven petitions of the Our Father and explain why the Church calls it the summary of the whole Gospel.
4. Participants hear the strongest Protestant objection to repetitive Catholic prayer and can answer it from Jesus' own words and practice.
5. Participants take one concrete step against anxiety this week anchored in 6:33, and feel the weight of the Sermon's ending: hearing and doing.

Timing for 90 Minutes

Win 15 min · Build 55 min · Send and Live It 12 min · Prayer 8 min. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: drop the Dig Deeper box on epiousios (saves about 5 minutes), then compress Build question 7 on judging and the Golden Rule into a read-and-comment (saves about 6 minutes). Do not cut the Our Father walk-through or the steelman chain.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 4 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Hidden Life of the Kingdom

Matthew 6–7 · 90 Minutes

Opening Prayer

Our Father, you see in secret, and you know what we need before we ask. Quiet the noise we brought in with us tonight. Teach us to pray as your Son taught his friends to pray, and make our hidden life with you more real to us than every audience we perform for. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. What is something you do completely differently when you know someone is watching?
2. What did prayer look like in the home you grew up in, if it was there at all?

Build (55 minutes)

The Audience of the Heart

1. Read Matthew 6:1–6 and 6:16–18. Last week Jesus commanded us to let our light shine before men (5:16); now he warns against practicing piety before men. Is he contradicting himself? What single difference separates the two? And notice the small word Jesus uses before giving, praying, and fasting: is it “if” or “when”?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The difference is the aim of the heart: in 5:16 the works are seen and the Father gets the glory; in 6:1 the works are performed so that we get the glory. Same works, different audience. And Jesus says “when,” never “if”: he assumes his disciples give alms, pray, and fast. He abolishes none of the three pillars; he relocates all three into the secret room where only the Father is watching.

2. **Live discovery.** These three practices were not new. Have someone find Tobit 12:8 and read verses 6–9. Who is speaking, and what three things does he commend together? For those meeting Tobit for the first time: it is one of the seven books in Catholic Bibles that most Protestant Bibles omit, and the Church has treasured it since the early centuries and definitively affirmed it as Scripture in her canon.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The angel Raphael, unveiling himself to Tobit and Tobias, commends prayer with fasting and almsgiving as the treasure of a righteous life. Jesus takes up exactly these three and drives them into the secret of the heart. The Church hands us the same three every Lent. Receive the Tobit moment as a gift: the Catholic Bible is not padded, it is whole, and here one of its “extra” books turns out to be the quiet source standing behind the Sermon on the Mount.

Build Then Press: Is Repeated Prayer “Vain Repetition”?

The Strongest Protestant Reading, Given at Full Strength

Read Matthew 6:7. Many Evangelical Christians, reading “do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words,” conclude that fixed, repeated prayers are exactly what Jesus forbids, and the Rosary looks like the leading example: the same words, dozens of times, counted on beads. On this reading, real prayer is spontaneous, personal conversation with God, and reciting formulas risks the very mechanical religion Jesus came to end. This objection is sincere, it takes Jesus' words seriously, and every Catholic who has ever rattled through a decade while thinking about lunch knows it is not attacking a strawman. Let it land.

3. Now press from the text and from Jesus' own practice. What does Jesus do in the very next verse after condemning empty phrases (6:9)? **Live discovery:** have one person find Matthew 26:44 and report how Jesus prays in Gethsemane; have another open Psalm 136 and describe its structure; have a third read Revelation 4:8 and report what the living creatures never stop doing.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The verse after the warning, Jesus gives his disciples a fixed prayer to say: “Pray then like this.” The Church has repeated it daily since the first century in direct obedience; the Didache, written within living memory of the apostles, already tells Christians to pray it three times a day. In Gethsemane Jesus prays a third time “saying the same words.” Psalm 136, known in Jewish tradition as the Great Hallel and sung at Passover, repeats one refrain twenty-six times. In heaven itself the living creatures never cease repeating the same praise day and night. Scripture cannot mean that repetition as such is vain.

The target of 6:7 is the pagan theory of prayer, *battalgeo*, piling up words to wear down or manipulate a distant god, when in fact “your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” The problem is empty words, not familiar ones. A well-prayed Rosary is the opposite of empty: the lips hold a rhythm while the heart walks through the Gospel, mystery by mystery. The objection remains useful, though, as an examination of conscience: Jesus forbids exactly what our repetition becomes when the heart goes home early. The answer to bad repetition is not no repetition; it is attention.

The Prayer That Contains All Prayers

4. Read Matthew 6:9–13 slowly. Count the petitions and sort them: which reach toward God, and which carry our needs? What is the significance of the order, and of the very first word?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Seven petitions: three Godward (his name hallowed, his kingdom come, his will done) and four for us (bread, forgiveness, protection in the trial, deliverance from evil). The order is the whole spiritual life in miniature: the Father first, our needs inside his priorities, which is 6:33 in prayer form. And the first word is “our”: even prayed alone, this prayer is never private; we pray as

members of a family. St. Augustine said that whatever we pray rightly, we are praying nothing that is not already somewhere in these lines.

Dig Deeper: The Strangest Word in the Prayer

The Greek word translated “daily,” *epiousios*, appears essentially nowhere else in ancient Greek literature; it is as if the prayer needed a word no one had ever used. Its most literal sense is “super-essential,” and St. Jerome rendered it “supersubstantial” at this verse in his Latin translation. The Church hears every level at once: bread for today like the manna that could not be stockpiled, the word of God, and the Bread of Life. The tradition treasures the Eucharistic overtone; hold it as a resonance rather than a proof.

The Father's Logic Against Anxiety

5. Read Matthew 6:25–34. What two classes of witnesses does Jesus call to testify against anxiety, and what is his actual argument? Is he forbidding planning, and what is the positive command at the center of the passage?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The birds, who neither sow nor reap and are fed, and the lilies, dressed beyond Solomon's splendor. The argument is a father's how-much-more: if the Father does this for birds and grass, will he not much more care for you? Jesus is not forbidding work or prudence, he is forbidding being mastered by worry, living as “men of little faith” with pagan assumptions about an unattended universe. The positive command is the anchor: seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and the rest is the Father's business.

Hearing and Doing

6. Read Matthew 7:1–5 and 7:12. What exactly does “judge not” forbid, and what does verse 5 still expect us to do? How does the Golden Rule tie off the whole Sermon?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Verse 1 forbids condemnation, appointing ourselves judges of hearts with a measure we would not survive ourselves. It does not forbid moral discernment: verse 5 still expects the speck to be dealt with, by a person who has first done surgery on his own eye, and verse 6 immediately requires making judgments about persons and situations. The Golden Rule then compresses everything: “this is the law and the prophets,” the very pair Jesus came to fulfil. The Sermon closes its own frame.

7. Read Matthew 7:21–29. This may be the most sobering paragraph in the Gospel. Who is excluded in verses 21–23, and what were they able to say and even do? What single difference separates the two builders? And how do the crowds react to the whole Sermon?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Excluded are people who said “Lord, Lord” and even prophesied and worked wonders in his name, yet did not do the will of the Father: religious vocabulary and religious activity without obedience of heart. The two builders hear the same words; only one does them, and only his house stands. Hold this note; it will return with full force at the end of the Gospel. The crowds are astonished because he taught “as one who had authority,” which is precisely what we discovered on the mountain last week: not a commentator on the Law, but its Author.

Send (12 minutes)

1. Of the three pillars, almsgiving, prayer, fasting, which one is effectively missing from your life right now, and what is the smallest secret version of it you could begin this week?
2. What is the anxiety you feed most faithfully? What would seeking the kingdom first look like in that exact corner of your life?

Live It This Week

- Pray the Our Father once a day at walking speed, one petition at a time, and let it audit your other prayers.
- Choose one secret act: an alms nobody learns about, a fast nobody notices, a prayer with the door shut. Tell no one.
- When anxiety starts its speech this week, interrupt it out loud with this week's verse.

Closing Prayer

Father, you see in secret and reward in secret, and you know what we need before we ask. Hallowed be your name in us this week. Give us today's bread and no addiction to tomorrow's, forgive us as we let go of our debtors, and keep us in the trial. Make us doers of the word, builders on rock, and bring us back together in your Son. Amen.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 6:33 (RSV2CE): *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.”*

EMMANUEL · SESSION 4 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

The Hidden Life of the Kingdom · Matthew 6–7

Primary Text

• Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18 · Matthew 6:7 · Matthew 6:9–13 · Matthew 6:25–34 · Matthew 7:1–5, 12 · Matthew 7:21–29

Live Discovery Passages

• Tobit 12:6–9 (the three pillars) · Matthew 26:44 (the same words in Gethsemane) · Psalm 136 (the repeated refrain) · Revelation 4:8 (unceasing praise)

Background Passages

• Matthew 5:16 with 6:1 (audience of the heart) · Exodus 16:4, 16–21 (daily manna) · 1 Kings 10:4–7 (Solomon's splendor) · Matthew 7:6 (discernment still required)

Catechism

• CCC 1434 · CCC 2761, 2763 · CCC 2837 · CCC 2608–2615

Memory Verse

• Matthew 6:33