

Transcript Segment, Part 2
“Praying the ‘Our Father’ with Jesus”

Presented by Michael Simone, S.J.

Let’s go on to, “who art in heaven.” This is not in the Lucan prayer. Luke’s version of the prayer doesn’t have this, so this is one of Matthew’s expansions, that God is in heaven. But it addresses the question, this verse and the next verse addresses the question, *where is God?* Where exactly is God located? So I think we take it for granted that God lives in heaven. Well, maybe we don’t take it for granted. This is what I learned and this is probably what’s still kicking around in my subconscious, is that God lives in heaven.

But in the ancient world, the locus of divine presence was more complex. Deities in heaven, certainly, but they also had places on Earth that were powerfully associated with them. I suspect . . . well, I’m not going to go on that tangent. So heaven and somewhere else. Now, much of this is described, I think, very well in this book by one of my own professors, P. Kyle McCarter, in his “Aspects of the Religion of Israel,” talks about the complexity of divine location and how God lives in heaven, certainly, but how that heavenly being could be available on earth to worshippers is something that’s worked out in a whole variety of forms in both the Hebrew Bible and in the religion of other peoples of the ancient Near East.

We have some answers in the Hebrew Bible to the question of heaven and what? One of them is heaven and the Temple. If you were to ask, in the popular mind of eighth-century Jerusalem, seventh-century Jerusalem, *where is God*, I suspect half of the people you asked would tell you he lives in the Temple. The Temple was known as the house of God. It was Beit Yahweh. That was not entirely a metaphor. There was a dining table placed out before God, every night, with bread on it, and with other utensils and cups, and presumably libations. God was fed a meal every night. If you come to understand the sacrificial theology that’s described in Leviticus, much of the meat that’s being sacrificed there is for God to consume in various ways. It was also for the worshipper to consume. Most of the sacrifice was eaten by the worshipper and the worshipper’s family.

What Jesus doesn’t say, though, is Our Father who lives in Zion. Now arguing from negative evidence is never a good way to establish something, but it’s noteworthy to me that Matthew’s version of this prayer puts God in heaven. That God is only there. So you have this great image of Isaiah, who answers the question, well, how could God be both in heaven and on earth? “I saw the Lord sitting on a throne high and lofty,” presumably heavenly, “the hem of his robe filled the Temple.” There’s some piece of God that dangles down into the Temple. Ezekiel describes it a little differently when he’s having his Temple vision. He sees the bottom of God’s throne mystically above the Temple or within the Temple. It’s not entirely clear how he does that. So people who wanted to place God in the Temple had these theologically well-developed ways of describing that. This is not something that Jesus is particularly interested in, and I’ll get to that in a second as to why.

The other possibility which we see in First Kings 19:8 is Sinai. I meant to make a slide, I clearly didn’t. When Elijah needs to go visit God in 1 Kings 19, he goes back to Sinai, he goes to Horeb, but that’s another word for Sinai. Now, the word Sinai and the word Horeb are not exactly good

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geographical words. Sinai just means shrub, so *Har Sinai* means shrub hill. Think of that next time you go past Mt. Sinai hospital, the Hebrew there is “shrub hill.” Horeb isn’t much more helpful. Horeb just means dry place, or empty place or devastated place. So we don’t really know where these places are, but you get a sense of what it looked like. It also is not something that seems to motivate Jesus, at least in the words of the Our Father. He’s not locating God anywhere on earth.

So this plays into something that my professor, Ted Lewis, calls exilic irony. In Ezekiel 11:23, God departs Jerusalem. Ezekiel has all of these absolutely Technicolor visions in the first 11, 12 chapters of his prophecy, and they are visions of the Presence, the divine Presence leaving the Temple. It’s leaving the Temple because the sins of Israel have made it impossible for God to remain. The divine Presence is also leaving the Temple because Nebuchadnezzar is on his way down destroy the Temple, and the divine Presence has to get out. So it’s a catastrophe that the Presence is leaving the temple, but you look at Ezekiel 11:23, the divine Presence takes up a position on a hill on the east side of Jerusalem, which today we know of as the Mount of Olives, and stays there. I think this is the exilic irony, as Ted Lewis calls it.

The people who are in exile would have been cut off from the Temple and not have had access to God’s presence. But now the Presence that was in the Temple is hovering there. If they turn toward Jerusalem the way that Daniel does in Daniel 6, a much later text albeit, they have access to the same Presence that they would have had if they had visited the Temple. It makes God available to the exiles in the Diaspora, that God has left the Temple. So it’s a catastrophe, but it’s also a way to stay in touch with the communities, even though they’re scattered.

Now, Dan Harrington is the one who points out, in Daniel 6 we have this image of people, Jews, in the Second Temple period, especially ones in the Diaspora, turning toward Jerusalem to pray. Dan, as we all know, is a lion of the field. I’ve never actually seen that written anywhere else, though. So until I find a better footnote for it, I don’t know that I can present it as great evidence. But it’s something that’s noteworthy, this notion that God hovered there over Jerusalem, waiting for the Temple to be rebuilt, waiting for his people to come back.

Did the Presence come back into the rebuilt Temple? The Temple was rebuilt, did the Presence return? It seems to be an open question in the Second Temple period. Many say yes. The Temple picks up where it left off, it’s not as well built, clearly, but many say yes. It seems like there were a substantial number of people in Jesus’s day who said no. So the covenanters, who we also know as the Qumran Community, or the Essenes, they seemed to say no. I think Jesus says no. Again, we’re reliant on the Evangelists to tell us what Jesus said. But none of them portrayed Jesus as really hyped up about the presence of God in the Temple. In fact, if anything, his words against the Temple are often held up as the reason why he was executed.

I think the early Christians said what Jesus said, probably remembered his not being too interested in the Temple, that Jesus still thought of God as residing in the heavens, primarily. There’s something universalist to that. I don’t want to overstate the case because I’ve always pointed out Jesus called my ancestors dogs, but, but he’s available anywhere. This is certainly something Christianity has picked up. This is never a question for us. God isn’t located in Rome or Salt Lake City or any of the other places where certain Christians have gathered and established their churches. God is everywhere. I think we see this in this Matthean line, “Our Father who art in heaven,” and not elsewhere. I think that informs the line. Am I overworking this? Possibly. Probably. But it’s where my mind is with it right now.

Let’s get on to the next thing, “hallowed be thy name.” This gets us into divine eminence. So this God who is in heaven, how does this God make the divine Presence available on earth? It seems like Jesus is drawing on a type of name theology that answers that question, and that is, name bears the

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divine Presence. The speaking of God's name makes God's presence, the actions taken in God's name make God present, that somehow that God has given us his name is something that overcomes whatever distance there might be between earth and heaven.

Now, there were a lot of other options in the ancient world, and the most common one was the making of idols or images. How else do you make a god present? You make a deity present by making an image. The Greeks, of course, were masters at this. I think it was Praxiteles, his statue of Athena was, in the ancient world, thought to be the most beautiful thing on earth. This is not available to Jews. If you want to know Israelites' solution to this presence, Tryggve Mettinger's book, *No Graven Image* is where you go for this. He lays out a whole series of possibilities, all of which have evidence, archeological and textual, in the ancient world.

The options that the biblical authors seemed to turn to were things that manifested the living presence of God, or things that maybe fractionally bore God's being to earth; so the things that manifested the living presence of God. The most common, and this is from the priestly texts, are God's glory. When we say "God's Glory," it's not entirely clear what that word means. But I think you get a good impression of it from the last verses of the Book of Exodus. The cloud covered the tented meeting and glory of the Lord, whatever the glory is, filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able enter the tented meeting because the cloud had settled up on it. The Glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Whenever the cloud was taken up, the Israelites would set out on each stage of their journey, but if the cloud was not taken up, they did not set out. Until the day that it was taken up. The cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and the fire was in the cloud by night before the eyes of all the House of Israel at each stage of their journey.

This is the answer to the question, *how does the God who resides in heaven make the divine Presence felt on earth, through the glory?* Whatever this is, this tissue of phenomena that surrounded the place of worship, that was probably drawn from storm imagery originally, but also describes the site of a burning altar and a cloud of incense. All of that there, whatever the phenomena was around the Temple, that was the Presence. And the people I mentioned before, who would have believed in the Temple, would have pointed to this phenomena as evidence for that.

The other possibility, and one that's interesting, given how important it was to the early Church, but one that Jesus does not turn to here, is the Spirit, which is related to this. The Spirit is wind, which can be another storm image. We translate the word only as Spirit today, but it also encompasses the idea of wind, especially great wind. Jesus doesn't mention the Spirit in the Our Father, which again, arguing from negative evidence, is not always helpful, but it's a noteworthy omission to me. I look at that and I think, well, that's something, that he turns to the name, specifically, as evidence for the Presence.

So I want to specifically talk about the name. The two people who've done the most work on this are S. Dean McBride. He points to these and other texts, but Deuteronomy, specifically, 12:5,14-23. "Jerusalem is the place where Yahweh will cause his name to dwell." Whatever it is about that name, it makes the divine present in Jerusalem. Now, I think it was Father Clifford who talks about the Temple in Jerusalem as kind of like a phone booth, that in the Deuteronomistic tradition, you could go to the Temple, and it was like you had access to a conduit that allows for . . . You're totally denying it. I've heard you say this. The name somehow connected you to God. Sandra Richter, who is another scholar who's written a little more recently points out, she encourages us to be a little more circumspect about the use of this language. The placing of the name is a legal idea. It means that you possess something, your name is on it.

Still, you have to explain Isaiah: "See, the name of the Lord is coming from afar, burning with anger, heavy with dread. His lips are filled with fury, his tongue like consuming fire." This is not legal

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ownership language. This is an understanding in Isaiah, but the name of God bears the divine presence. When the name shows up, the presence is there. Now this is clearly Isaiah working with something like a storm God image, and not one that Jesus would use. But the underlying theology is perhaps more what we're interested in: the name makes the divine present.

So one of the problems, one of our realities, is that by Jesus's time, the divine name was not often used. So it was a blasphemy, it was a capital offense to use the divine name. So what was Jesus doing with all this name theology? I think really what he's saying is that speaking of God with reverence makes God a presence. I turn to this, to Matthew's memory, in 18:20, "Where two or more are gathered in my name," Jesus's name, "I am there with them." I think Matthew's understanding of this about Jesus is probably coming from a wider understanding of how the divine name works. When actions are taken in God's name, even if you don't mention the divine name, that makes God present. When prayers are offered to the divine name, that makes God present. This answers the question of how a God who resides in heaven can also be simultaneously present on earth.

I think Jesus's mind needed to answer these questions, I think. Or at least maybe he didn't answer them himself, but he was drawing on the answers that were available in his time. The name makes the divine presence.