

OCTOBER 8 2025 FATHER FRANCIS SALASAR

A man once shared a story about his little daughter who had just learned the Lord's Prayer. One night, she insisted on saying it herself. She started confidently: **"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done... give us this steak, and daily bread... forgive us our trash baskets as we forgive those who put trash in our baskets."**

The father smiled but later said, "You know, her version might not be perfect, but maybe it's more real than ours. Because in the end, we do carry trash baskets in our hearts, and we need a father who can empty them every day with mercy."

That simple story captures the essence of today's readings. Both Jonah and Luke point us to a God who is good, merciful, patient, and forgiving—even when we don't deserve it, even when we resist it, even when we struggle to extend it to others.

We know the story of Jonah, how he runs away from God's call. Today's text finds Jonah at his lowest point. The great city of Nineveh, the capital of the brutal Assyrian empire and Israel's sworn enemy, has just repented. From the greatest to the least, they have listened to Jonah's warning and turned from their evil ways. And God, in His infinite mercy, has relented and spared the city. This should be one of the greatest evangelistic success stories in history! A single prophet brings an entire city to its knees in repentance. But Jonah is not celebrating. Jonah is not just angry; he is furious because God showed mercy to the Ninevites.

He is bitter that God has not done what Jonah wanted. He essentially says, *"See, Lord? This is why I didn't want to come here. I knew You were gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. I knew You would forgive them—and I didn't want that."* Jonah's problem is not

ignorance of God's character—it's that he doesn't want God's goodness extended to his enemies. He is trapped in resentment.

Jonah didn't want a merciful God for his enemies. He wanted a god of vengeance who would smite the Assyrians and affirm Israel's superiority. He would rather die than live in a world where God's love is bigger than his own prejudices.

If we are truthful, oftentimes, we find ourselves in the place of Jonah. We love God's mercy for us. We cling to it. We depend on it. But we are deeply suspicious of it for others. We want grace for ourselves and justice for everyone else. We want God to punish the politician we despise, the coworker who betrayed us, the family member who hurt us, the system we disagree with. We want them to feel the sun beating down. We want them to wither. And when we see them blessed, when we see them finding peace, when we see them seemingly getting away with it, we cry out with Jonah, "God! This isn't fair! Don't you know who they are? Don't you know what they've done?" We want a god made in our own petty, vengeful image.

But God uses the plant to teach Jonah a lesson. Jonah cares more about the plant giving him shade than about an entire city of people, created in God's image, who were saved from destruction. God's final words pierce: *"Should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left?"*

The point is clear: God's mercy is far wider than our preferences, prejudices, or personal comforts. His compassion reaches even those we would rather not forgive. When we put Jonah and the Lord's Prayer side by side, we see a challenge. Jonah resists extending God's mercy. He cannot bring himself to forgive. But Jesus, in teaching us to pray, makes mercy central. We are to ask daily for forgiveness and to offer forgiveness daily to others.

The prayer Jesus teaches us is the antithesis of Jonah's prayer. Jonah prayed, *"I am angry because you are merciful."* Jesus teaches us to pray, *"Make me*

merciful, because you are merciful.” The Lord’s Prayer ties forgiveness directly to our willingness to forgive others: *“Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.”* That means our prayer for mercy is only authentic if we are willing to extend it. We cannot hold onto grudges and at the same time expect God’s forgiveness to flow freely in us. Jonah teaches us the danger of holding back mercy; the Lord’s Prayer teaches us the joy of giving it away.

So, dear brothers and sisters, let us not be like Jonah, sitting under a plant, angry at God’s mercy. Let us instead be like children praying the Lord’s Prayer, trusting in a Father whose goodness never runs out and whose mercy is new every morning. Imagine how different our world would look if more people lived this way. Imagine a community where grudges were released, where kindness outweighed anger, where people looked at each other not with suspicion but with compassion. That is the kingdom of God breaking into our midst.