

In today's second reading Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit coming to help us in our prayer. "For when we cannot choose words in order to pray properly, the Spirit himself expresses our plea in a way that could never be put into words".

Tradition has understood that Paul is telling us that our prayers, specifically, our prayers of petition, are both heard and helped by God.

St Augustine considered that Jesus had given us the perfect prayer when he taught his disciples the Our Father. In replying to a widow who had been disturbed by Paul saying that we do not know what to pray for Augustine explained that the Lord's Prayer was the bench mark for evaluating our petitions: "For whatever other words we may say if we pray rightly we say nothing but what is already contained in the Lord's Prayer."

Our Dominican brother St Thomas Aquinas agreed with Augustine while going even further for he considered that the Our Father not only contained everything we should ask for in prayer but it did so by putting our requests in their right order.

At the Last Supper Jesus promised that the Spirit would come to us in person: "[The Father] will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. ... You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you." The Spirit is interiorly present bestowing and sustaining in the believer the awareness of being God's child. Paul tells us it is the Spirit who bears witness with our spirit "that we are children of God." That is the context in which the Spirit helps us in our prayer. As St John in one of his letters has reminded us, "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed." As children we are dependent on the Holy Spirit. Perhaps we might think of a parent's presence to their child, alongside them, helping them to discover and express their deepest and most genuine desires while growing in their relationship with their child. The Spirit's presence helps us so that our hopes and desires reflect those of the Lord's Prayer while at the same time nurturing us in our new identity, given through faith and Baptism, as children of God.