

Archbishop Smith: Alignment for Tee-Off

On Saturday, St. Michael's parish in Leduc, Alberta, hosted a golf tournament for its parishioners. They kindly invited me to be present at the start of the event to bless the golfers and do the ceremonial tee-off. I readily agreed.

Well, when I stepped up onto the tee-box, I found myself surrounded by about a hundred golfers – including the club pro – who gathered to watch the shot. How do you define 'pressure?' Wondering why on earth I do these things to myself, I approached the ball and teed off. ... Let's just say the result wasn't stellar. A great antidote to pride, this game.



St. Michael Catholic Church in Leduc, Alberta. Lincoln Ho, Grandin Media

Reflecting later upon the possible causes of the errant drive, I realized that I hadn't paid sufficient attention to alignment. When the body is not properly aligned with the hoped-for trajectory of the shot, the ball will go in any number of directions other than the right one.

In Sunday's Gospel narrative (Luke 11:1-13), we heard the disciples ask Jesus to teach them how to pray. That is a question of capital importance. Prayer is life's 'tee-off,' as it were. The answer that Jesus gives is all about alignment. We pray correctly when our mindset is properly aligned with the truth about God and our relationship with Him. That truth is fully captured in the term 'Father.' In Luke, we hear Jesus say, "When you pray, say: 'Father'..." As Matthew recalls it for us (cf. Matthew 6: 9-13), Jesus taught us also to use

the possessive pronoun 'our.' Hence we have the "Our Father" as the "Lord's Prayer." We pray as the Lord would have us do when our minds – indeed, our entire lives – align with the full meaning of both 'Father' and 'Our.'

FATHER

To call upon God as 'Father' is to acknowledge Him as source of all, as the One upon whom we – and all things – depend absolutely. It is thus to abandon all illusion of self-reliance and to recognize that nothing is possible apart from Him. At the same time, it is to acknowledge that we are His children. To pray to God as children means that we do so simply, persistently and with trust in God's loving care. Like children, we at times think we know what we want but in reality do not (cf. Romans 8:26). To pray as children to our loving Father is to admit that, in the final analysis, God alone knows what is good for us, and thus to accept that He will answer in accordance not with our very limited perspective but with His infinite wisdom. If my mindset is not aligned with this truth, the trajectory of my life will very quickly fly off-target.

OUR

In our hyper-individualized Western society, this particular pronoun has become a challenge. We are told that the ego must always take centre stage, that I am my own reference point, my own moral compass. That this leads to the crippling loneliness and anxiety so rampant in our world today is obvious. Such a life is not aligned with truth. There is only one God, one Father of all. By Baptism, we are united to Jesus Christ, the one and only Son, and thus become by adoption what Jesus is by nature: the children of God, inescapably brothers and sisters to one another, a family whose members need one another. When I consciously align my prayer and my life with this truth, I recognize with joy that I am not alone, and accept with seriousness my responsibility to live not for myself but for God and for others, especially those most in need.

When seeking to improve one's golf game, it is good to watch a pro and follow his/her instructions. Seeing the 'pro' at prayer, the disciples asked Jesus how they might learn to pray like him. What they received was more than mere instruction. The answer of Jesus was an invitation not merely to pray like him but actually to enter into his prayer. This is the ultimate alignment. Let's ask the Lord to draw us into his prayer to the Father, so that, in him, our lives will be perfectly aligned with the will of God and thus follow their proper trajectory.