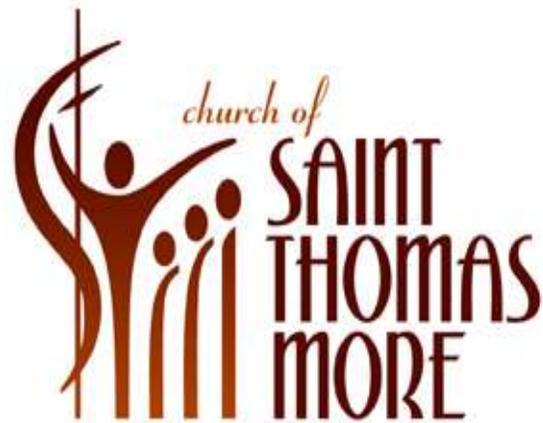


Lord Teach Us To Pray

Some may find it strange to learn that the Lord's Prayer, easily the most common prayer for Christians, was not always a part of our liturgical celebrations. It seems like such a natural fit, with its themes of "bread" and "forgiveness," to begin our sharing in the Eucharistic meal.



But it wasn't until late in the fourth century that the Our Father entered the Mass. It originally came immediately *after* the breaking of the bread (which occurs during the singing of the "Lamb of God"), but Pope St. Gregory the Great transferred it to right after the Eucharistic Prayer, to tie it more closely with the great prayer of thanksgiving.

In the Eastern Church, the Our Father was sung by everyone, but in the West, only the priest prayed the prayer, with the assembly answering "Amen" after each of the petitions, or at the conclusion of the prayer.

Now, all of us are invited to join in this prayer, which Jesus taught the disciples when they asked, "Lord, teach us to pray." The text we pray at Mass comes from Jesus' response, as recorded in Matthew's Gospel. (Matt 6: 9-13) We will hear Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer in a Gospel later this summer.

We are not to sing or say these words with a casual air. Voicing this prayer is a bold action. Listen to the way the priest invites us to join this prayer, using phrases such as "Let us pray with confidence..." or "we have the courage to say...". After all, we are praying "for the coming of the kingdom."

We are also praying "for daily food, which for Christians means preeminently the Eucharistic bread, and also for purification from sin, so that what is holy may, in fact, be given to those who are holy." (GIRM 81)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church has a wonderful section devoted to the Lord's Prayer, which I urge everyone to read. The Catechism takes the prayer line by line and explores the deep meaning behind each phrase, from the intimate relationship we invoke when we call God "Our" Father, to the seven petitions and what it means to ask for God to "forgive us our trespasses **as** we forgive those who trespass against us" (a petition the Catechism calls "astonishing" (CCC #2838).

Doxology – For the Kingdom...

The Lord's Prayer entered the mass late in the fourth century. For reasons unknown to scholars, an addition known as an "embolism" (from a Greek word meaning "piece added to a garment") was tacked on about 100 years later. This embolism, "deliver us

Lord, from every evil..." is an expansion on the last line of the Our Father, "deliver us from evil." Even when the Lord's Prayer was sung or said by everyone, the embolism was voiced only by the priest, often ad-libbing.

At times the embolism included petitions asking to be delivered from various evils, and even invoked the intercession of the Virgin Mary and Apostles. Liturgist Lucien Deiss questions why this often-meandering prayer was kept in the reforms of Vatican II: "Was the Lord's Prayer not enough? Was it necessary to complete the words of Jesus?" (from *"The Mass"* by Lucien Deiss published by Liturgical Press)

While it was retained, it has been shortened. The focus is now on deliverance from every evil, followed by a prayer for perfect peace with the second coming of Christ. It closes with a quote from the letter to Titus "as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ." (Titus 2:13)

That statement invites the assembly's response: "For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever." This doxology was taken from a prayer in the ancient teaching, the *Didache*, which places it in the first or second century. It concludes the Lord's Prayer in most Eastern Churches and in the Protestant denominations. By restoring it in the liturgical reforms of Vatican II, the Church echoes the praise of centuries of Christians to conclude this prayer.

It is interesting to note that the doxology which concludes the Eucharistic Prayer ("through him, with him, in him...") is reserved for the priest alone. But the doxology to the Lord's Prayer is meant for everyone. It is such a strong statement of praise that Music in Catholic Worship lists it among the acclamations that "ought to be sung, even at Masses in which little else is sung." (MCW # 54)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church points out that this final doxology "takes up again, by inclusion, the first three petitions to the Father: the glorification of his name, the coming of his reign, and the power of his saving will. But these prayers are now proclaimed as adoration and thanksgiving, as in the liturgy of heaven." (CCC # 2855)

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