



The Mass in Slow Motion



The Our Father

This is a series on the Mass explaining the meaning and history of what we do each Sunday. This series of flyers is an attempt to add insight and understanding to our celebration of the Sacred Liturgy. You are also invited to learn more by attending Sunday School classes for adults which take place in the school cafeteria each Sunday from 9:45 am. to 10:45 am.

This series will follow the Mass in order.

The “Our Father” is the best-known prayer among Christians. Its placement in the Mass just before communion is natural since it is a petition both for daily food, which, for Christians, means also the Body and Blood of the Lord, and also, for forgiveness from sin, so that what is holy may be given to those who are holy.

The priest invites all the faithful to sing or say the Lord's Prayer with him, *At the Savior's command and formed by divine teaching, we dare to say....* The people then say or sing the “Our Father” with the priest.

You may wonder why the text reads: “...we dare to say....” The answer simply is that it is a daring thing to call God our own Father unless the Lord had so instructed, even commanded us. It



is one thing to call him “The Father,” or to hear God call himself “Our Father,” but to say “Our Father” on our own is something daring and done, only by explicit teaching from the Lord Himself. In fact, the prayer was withheld from catechumens until shortly before their baptism because one can only be said to be a child of the Father, able to call Him Father, by being baptized into Christ, the true and eternal Son of the Father. It is through baptism that we become a member, a part, of Christ's Body, and it is through being in Christ the Son, that we can truly call God, “Father.”

At the end of the “Our Father” the priest alone adds a prayer called the “embolism,” a strange word that most modern English speakers associate with a blockage or clot in a blood vessel. But originally in Greek and Latin, “embolismus” referred to an insertion, or extension of some sort. Hence this prayer is inserted between the Lord's Prayer and the familiar doxology “For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever.”

History of the Lord's Prayer in the Mass - There is evidence as early as the Fourth Century that the “Our Father” was included in the Mass. It seems to have come last to Spain in the Sixth Century. Today its place in the Roman Rite is just after the Eucharistic Prayer. In very early times there is evidence that the prayer was not said until immediately before the reception of Communion. It was Gregory the Great (590-604) who placed it in its present location.

In most Liturgies of the Eastern Church the prayer was recited aloud by all. However, rather early in the Western, or Roman Rite, the prayer came to be recited only by the priest with the people making only the last acclamation: *sed libera nos a malo* (but deliver us from evil). This seems to be the case at the time of Saint Augustine. This was because the thinking of the time considered the Our Father to be a part of the Canon of the Mass, (the Eucharistic Prayer). That prayer is said only by the priest who is praying in the person of Christ to the heavenly Father. Today however, the Eucharistic Prayer is deemed to end with the “Amen” of the people at the per ipsum (Through him, with Him and in Him...) and the Our Father is grouped with the “Communion rite.” The Communion Rite is a series of prayers to prepare the faithful for Holy



Communion and includes the Our Father, the Sign of Peace, the Lamb and of God and the prayer, O Lord I am not worthy.

The posture of the people during the Our Father has undergone some change here too. On days that did not have a festal character, the people were directed to make a profound bow. In some places, the celebrant also observed this bow. An interesting practice in some places was for the celebrant or the deacon to hold up the host (or ciborium) at the words: "Give us this day our daily bread." Today, the prayer is said aloud (or sung) by all in a standing posture. There is also a modern practice by some to extend their hands during this prayer. While the practice is not forbidden, some argue that this looks too much like the priest (who alone is directed to extend his hands) and confuses the distinction between him and the people. If one is to extend their hands at all, perhaps it is better to extend them with palms upward to God, rather than side to side like the priest. Another practice of the whole congregation holding hands at this moment is to be discouraged since it was never part of the tradition and tends to be invasive of the personal space of others, creating an awkward demand for conformity and also reducing the significance of the sign of peace that is to shortly follow.



Some other Pastoral thoughts on the Our Father:

- 1. The “Our Father”, according to Augustine, is like washing one's face before going to the altar.** “Forgive us our sins...so that we may approach in peace and so that we may not eat or drink what we receive unto judgment." At Hippo, Augustine mentions that all struck the breast at the words: “Forgive us our trespasses...” Hence this is a purification rite of sorts.
- 2. “Our daily bread”** is a clear reminder of the “bread from heaven” we are about to receive and so the Eucharistic reference of the prayer is clear to ears of faith. Many early Catechisms are emphatic about this reference. In fact, in the Greek text of the “Our Father”, the word we moderns translate as “daily” is really, in Greek, *epiousion*, which is literally translated as “super-substantial.” So, our daily bread is more than the substance of ordinary food. It is the super-substantial food of the very Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus, a higher food, than ordinary food.
- 3. The Embolism**, as we have seen, means that prayer which is inserted at the end of the Lord’s Prayer which begins with the words, “Deliver us, O Lord, from every evil...” Historically, this prayer is very ancient and seems always to have been appended to the end of the prayer. It seems there was an instinct to develop the final thought of the “Our Father” and to contextualize it. All the Eastern liturgies show a similar prayer.
- 4. The Doxology** - The embolism bridges to the familiar doxology “For the Kingdom, the power and glory are yours, now and forever.” The doxology is to many modern Catholic ears a “Protestant thing” since they always attach it to the Lord’s Prayer whenever they say it, but without the embolism. However, the use of this response, “For the kingdom...” is more ancient than the Protestants, who appear in the 16th Century. The Didache (CA 90 AD) places the doxology at the end of the “Our Father” and it is in most Eastern Liturgies. The word “doxology” means “a word of praise, or glory.” Thus, having prayed this prayer, given to us by Jesus, and having added some petitions in the embolism, we glorify God who has given us the privilege of calling him Father.

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Mass schedule: Sundays: 8 am, 9:30 am, 11 am & 7 pm; Saturdays: 8 am & 4:30 pm; Daily: 7 am in the chapel