

The Meaning of the Mass Part 5

The Lord's Prayer

To understand what the Lord's Prayer means when we pray it at Massⁱ, then we need to remember the context - why for nearly 2,000 years the Church has prayed the Lord's Prayer immediately after the Eucharistic Prayer. We need to remember what just happened in the Eucharistic Prayer: Our lives have been drawn into the one perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ and offered to the Father as the one perfect and eternal sacrifice of the Son. The bread and wine have been transformed to become the Body and Blood of our Lord. Heaven and earth have been united and The Church prayed that this communion of all the world with the Son and the Holy Spirit continue forever in eternity. We have offered all to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. Through Him, With Him, and In Him. The Lord's Prayer is the first part of the Communion Rites of the Mass. But Communion is more than just receiving the Host – ***we are celebrating the communion of love that was just established in the Eucharistic Prayer now as we, the Church, stand within the love of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*** – and it all begins with the Lord's Prayer. Christ invites his body to address the words of this prayer to his Father – through Him, With Him, and in Him – the consummation of the sacrifice just offered on the altar in the Eucharistic prayer. The rite begins with the words “our Father” and that Christ's sacrifice in the Eucharistic Prayer climaxes with the words “O God, almighty Father...” – ***this tells us that by the sacrifice of Christ we have been thrust into the very heart of the Father and our definitive future with God.*** We pray out of our new identity, our new incorporation into the life of God – that is the context in which we look at the Lord's Prayer.

“*Father*” is a name we can only use because of our communion with the sacrifice of Christ. It is the title Jesus used in his own prayer and was used by the Lord on the cross when he said, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” – a name that never ceases to sound from the cross – while the Father says in response, “You are my beloved son.” **“Father” makes present the cross while “Son” makes present the resurrection - that's the Paschal Mystery.** In John 20:17, Jesus shares with us his relationship with the Father in the resurrection when he said, “go tell my disciples that I am going to my Father and their Father”. The term Father is a statement of intimacy. We can say this name only through Jesus, with Jesus, and in Jesus – this is a title of communion and love. **“Our” refers not to us, but to the Son and the Spirit first and foremost** since it is their prayer; we are now raised to the same level with them. This is a personal address to God, as we become God's people and he is our God. It is the one prayer of the Church eternally and universally -- our prayer of communion of Saints and Sinners.

“*Who art in heaven*” – Jesus is the one who always prays this within us. Heaven is not so much a place as it is a way of being; our future where we will share God's way of being. God's being is Father, Son and Spirit which is loving Communion itself. In the Mass, We are already where we hope to be forever – in love's eternal flow. **Heaven, then, is within us but not because of our own doing or part of our nature; it is placed within us when the Father hands us the Body and Blood of his Son.** In Christ, Heaven and earth are joined together forever. “*Hallowed by thy name*” means that the name “Father” be uttered and known with reverence everywhere and at all time. God's name unfolds in our lives as part of the “hallowing” process. People must know us as children of a loving Father who honor the Lord's name and presence in our lives always. “*Thy kingdom come*” – We pray that God's definitive rule is established and the Lord is drawing near to save us from sin; Jesus' victory over sin and death accomplished on the Cross of Calvary to be firmly established in Christ's second coming. The Father will answer this petition when we receive the Lord's Body and Blood and the grace of our Lord's sacrifice, through which he initiated the Kingdom, is offered to us. Indeed, we are praying for the Kingdom established on {Meaning of the Mass 5;}

Calvary to now govern our lives and our world. *“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” – In the Eucharist, God’s will has been done on earth perfectly just as in heaven; only the sacrifice of Jesus is perfect and acceptable to the Father. When we receive the Body and Blood of Jesus, our own bodies become the place on earth where the will of the Father is done because we are joined to the one body of Christ.* As Jesus said, “I always do what is pleasing to the Father” John 8:29.

Now the prayer shifts and we move to request what we need to live in the present. *“Give us this day our daily bread”* – On the surface, this can mean a request for what we need to stay alive; as such, it expresses dependence on a loving Father who is the source of all good things. On a deeper level, though, it refers to our desire for the Word of God because Man does not live by bread alone. The Word of God is a Person -- the Son as real food in the Body and Blood of Christ. This expresses our need for the Eucharist as the supernatural bread which transforms us into the Body of Christ. While in English we pray for our “daily” bread, the Greek term, *epiousious*, actually means something more like “supernatural” bread. So this petition is a prayer for the ongoing gift of the Body and Blood of Jesus that has just been realized in the Eucharistic Prayer so that we can be transformed to become his Body. *“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”* – Our request for forgiveness from God now has a condition: that we be forgiven as we forgive. This would be dangerous if it were not prayed through and with and in Jesus. Do we really want God to forgive us as we forgive others? Only if it is Christ who is forgiving in us because only Jesus forgives perfectly and completely. In Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, present on the altar, we can say with Jesus “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Only by being in communion with his sacrifice can we love as he loved and forgive as he forgave. ***Forgiveness is not based on our human ability to forgive others but on the generous mercy of Christ himself who will forgive in us and through us.***

“And lead us not into temptation” –We are praying that our Communion with Jesus will never be broken and that God will not allow us to take the path that leads to sin. When Mass is over, we will return to the sinful and wounded world in which we live and we will continue to face the daily battle of good and evil; we must face this with the heavenly Father and so we beg him to save us from stumbling away from him. By this request, we are praying that we might always remain in the communion which we now enjoy. “But deliver us from evil” – this really means Satan. ***Our only deliverance from the evil one lies in our communion with God whom we are about to receive in the Eucharist. We are helpless on our own.*** “...we know that any one begotten of God does not sin but he who was begotten of God protects him” (1 John 5:18). ***In the Eucharistic Prayer, the Church has just been begotten by God in the one Sacrifice of Jesus and now we pray to be protected in light of our incorporation in Christ Jesus. This is a prayer for the whole world and not just the assembly gathered! It is a prayer that the whole world be freed from all evils, past, present, and future. That is the power of the Lord’s Prayer in the context of the Mass.***

ⁱ To understand what the Lord’s Prayer means when we pray it individually as part of our personal prayer life, you are encouraged to read the reflection for the 17th Sunday of Year C in *Come Follow Me*.