



If you have ever prayed together with Christians from different backgrounds, one prayer you might have prayed together is the Our Father. As Charles Belmonte says, “Jesus Christ himself deigned to compose this prayer to indicate how we should address God. It is our Savior’s own prayer and, therefore, the prayer of the Christian. In the early Church, the Lord’s Prayer was taught to the catechumens [those preparing to enter the Church through baptism] only a few weeks before baptism. Outside the Mass, it was always said in a low voice. It seemed that the faithful recited it before Communion...” (Understanding the Mass, p. 169). The Our Father is the prayer of the Christian, the follower of Jesus. However, as we know, different groups of Christians have developed some different traditions over time. Among those traditions is what we say next after the Our Father.

A Prayer between Prayers

As the Diocese of Peoria teaches, in the Mass, after the Our Father, the priest prays some special words called the Embolism, “asking the Lord to deliver us from evil, keep us free from sin and [distress] until the day when we see the Lord Jesus Christ face to face” (A Study of the Mass, p. 17). Most of us will probably recognize these words: “Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil, and graciously grant peace in our days, that, by the help of your mercy, we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress, as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.” As the Missal says, “The people conclude the prayer, acclaiming: ‘For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever’.”

At the end of the Our Father, we pray for forgiveness and acknowledge our need to forgive. As we approach Jesus in the Eucharist, we anticipate a strengthening in peace that he brings. However, as Fr. Guy Oury notes, “But before the people are invited to show that they are at peace with one another, there is a sort of commentary that lingers on the final words in the Our Father (‘deliver us from every evil’). Almost all Christian liturgies have this. It is called an embolism (a development placed between two prayers, from the Greek em-bal-lein, [meaning] to put in or between). The Church develops the final petition of the Lord’s Prayer to ask that we be delivered from the power of evil” (The Mass, p. 109–10). As Oury continues, “The people’s acclamation in response existed in almost all liturgies of the Mass. That is why the Roman liturgy adopted it in turn. It comes from the Didache or the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, a document of the Apostolic Age (first century) that gives it as a conclusion to the Our Father. Its liturgical use is very old...” (The Mass, p. 110).

An “Extra Ending” to the Lord’s Prayer?

Regarding the people’s acclamation, Edward Sri writes, “This prayer is sometimes known as the Protestant ending of the Lord’s Prayer. Though it is not part of the prayer that Jesus actually taught us (and fittingly is not included in the Our Father recited in the Catholic liturgy) (see Mt 6:9–13; Lk 11:1–4), this prayer does have biblical roots and finds its appropriate home at this moment in the Mass. On a basic level, the prayer reflects similar acclamations found in the heavenly liturgy (Rev 5:12; 19:1). And when we pray it, we come in contact with the Mass of some of the earliest Christians. For these words are taken from a prayer of thanksgiving used in the celebration of the Eucharist in the first generation of Christianity after the apostles” (A Biblical Walk Through the Mass, p. 128).

Does that mean that the “extra ending” of the Our Father that many other Christians pray is actually a “Catholic” ending? Yes: it came from some of the earliest celebrations of the Mass! If you look up the Our Father in your Catholic Bible, you won’t find these additional words. (Some Protestant versions of the Bible may have it inserted in the text, although scholarly versions typically do not.) However, if you look in the living Tradition of Christian faith in the Catholic Church, you will find those words as part of the Mass as a commentary and response to the Our Father.

The Biblical Roots of the Acclamation

Continuing with Sri, “the words themselves reach 1,000 years further back into the Old Testament period. They are derived from King David’s climactic praise of God at the end of his reign, representing one of David’s last acts as king before he passed the throne on to his son Solomon: ‘Blessed are thou, O Lord, the God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all’ (1 Chr 29:10–11).

At every Mass, we echo these words of King David. In doing so, we acknowledge God as the Lord of our lives and praise him for all the blessings he bestows upon us. Whatever good we might do, whatever success we might experience, ultimately comes from God: ‘For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever’” (A Biblical Walk Through the Mass, p. 128–9).