

# *Joining Together in Prayer: Our Father*

A person introduced to Queen Elizabeth II is not to speak until spoken to. The initiative—to begin or end—a conversation belongs to royalty. People walk backwards out of her presence, lest a commoner turn his back on a queen. No one eats until the queen picks up her fork and no one continues eating after she has finished. Yet the queen is only a woman, subject, like all of us, to illness and death.

How, then, do we have the courage, the audacity, to address the true and eternal King, the King of the universe? We come before the One “whose kingdom will have no end,” and we speak. Recall that the heavenly host in Isaiah’s vision sings of God, but not to God, “the maker of heaven and earth.” Yet, we not only address God directly, but we use an intimate address. We call him “Father.” How is it that we are not struck by lightning in our pews? Not felled where we stand?

We are on solid ground when we pray the Our Father: Jesus himself taught his disciples this prayer, and Jesus himself invites us into an intimate relationship with the Father. In John’s gospel, Jesus prays for his own “that they may be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they may also be in us...” (John 17:21a) We go down into the waters of baptism that we might go up into the life of God.

Still the Church acknowledges the brave truth of what we do. In his invitation to pray the Our Father, the priest says

*At the Savior’s command*

*And formed by divine teaching*

*We dare to say,*

We have journeyed far into the liturgy when we pray together the words Jesus gave us. We have remembered and recalled who God is, and who we are before God. We have asked forgiveness for our sins. We have heard our stories proclaimed. We have sung with the angels the eternal praise of God. The church acknowledges we could never be so bold if we were not commanded and formed, called and taught. Christ himself becomes the door through which we enter into the holy presence; Christ’ words are given us to speak there.

Though the Our Father and its concluding acclamation do not change in the new translation of the Mass, we hear a significant change as the priest prays between the Our Father and the acclamation.

*Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil,*

*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.*

We all know the prayer, “Free us from all anxiety.” Anxiety comes as the result of a particular situation; it is a feeling, an emotional response. The new translation brings us back to the concrete, that is, to the distress—in mind or in body—which is the occasion of anxiety.

We proclaim that Christ will come again. Do we always proclaim this truth joyfully? We proclaim it dying and mourning; we proclaim it abandoned and bereft. We proclaim Christ’ coming again in glory from hospital beds and wheelchairs, and at gravesides. We may not feel joy, but we do know hope. We wait in hope.

In the use of this phrase, the church links us to the earliest days of the faith. Saint Paul writes to Titus about the establishment of a new church. He writes of difficult things: Arrogant bishops and lying laity. None of this brings joy. But Paul nevertheless describes himself, and all Christians, as those who “await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory...of our savior Jesus Christ.” (Titus 2:13)