

# THE OUR FATHER

## *A New Reading*

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## 10. Desperate Cry and Confident Trust



WHETHER THE LAST CLAUSE of the Our Father as Jesus spoke it was "lead us not into temptation" or "deliver us from evil," it ends abruptly. It breaks off with a desperate cry. Such a prayer ending was so foreign to the mentality of Jewish prayer at that time that a doxology was very quickly added to round off the ending of the Our Father: "For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen."

The seventh petition in Matthew's version may also have been an early attempt to soften the abrupt ending we find in Luke—an ending that is not only unusual but chilling. But Jesus may have intended just such a conclusion to the prayer: in it he would have expressed in the *form* of the prayer the distress of the one praying—that is, of a disciple of Jesus—but also that of the people of God and of God's cause.

Apparently we are unable, by ourselves, to see the true misery of the world, and especially not the extreme distress of the people of God, which is supposed to be the place where paradise is already shining forth, the place where God's reign is already flowering in the world. Instead, we continually obliterate this will of God for salvation. We do so by hal-  
lowing our own names and not the name of God; by not acknowledging God's rule but wanting to be our own masters; by not entering into God's plan but serving our private interests; by not trusting, without security, that on the coming day God will care for us, relying instead on our own provision for our lives.

We hinder the coming of the reign of God by refusing to forgive, insisting rigidly and proudly on our own rights. Above all, we do so by constantly being unfaithful to our calling. That is the misery of the people of God. That is why the Our Father is pure petition and why it ends with a cry.

In light of this critical situation, the Our Father's intention is to gather disciples and strengthen them in their existence as such. The Our Father's desire is that the gathering and sanctification of the people of God may become our foremost concern. It desires that we not be troubled about the success of our own plans but concern ourselves with the success of God's

plan. It wants God to be master, not we ourselves. It desires that every member of the people of God help the others: those who follow Jesus directly and those who assist them. It wants us to forgive each other our sins every day. It desires, ultimately, to make us aware how immediately each of us is in danger of falling away from faith.

Those who have grasped what the Our Father really says must know that it has consequences. It is a dangerous prayer, and still we can pray it—because this prayer also contains enormous confidence, which begins with the very first word, *Abba*, the familiar address to the father stemming from the intimate circle of the family. That confidence also comes, however, from the knowledge that God's plan will succeed because God's word does not return to God empty. And it is connected with the insight that God's mercy is without limit. When people wholeheartedly forgive one another's sins, can there be any doubt that God forgives? That is why the Our Father is a prayer filled with trust. Every baptized person may pray it, also and especially those who have understood their guilt and recognized how far they are from true discipleship of Jesus. And that means all of us.