

The Lord's Prayer
Introduction and First Petition
Matthew 6:5-15, 7:7-11
Galatians 4:1-7 | Psalm 23

This year we're taking a closer look at the Lord's Prayer. We are all guilty of not praying like we should. We neglect prayer even though our Lord commands us to pray in the second commandment. We neglect prayer even though our Father adds promises all over Scripture to hear us. Like one from our reading tonight: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him." (Mt 7:11) If that weren't enough, the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh continue to attack us this side of glory we have constant need to pray. And yet, we often neglect our prayers.

I believe Christians from all times have struggled with their prayers. There really is nothing new under the sun. Jesus knows of your struggles. He helps you by giving you the very words to pray. The Lord's Prayer is recorded in two places: Matthew 6 and Luke 11. In the Luke account, Jesus says, "When you pray, say..." (Lk 11:2) This means he actually intends for you to use the words of the Lord's Prayer verbatim. In Matthew, Jesus says, "Pray then like this:..." (Mt 6:9) The Greek can be interpreted either "like this" or "thusly" implying saying the words verbatim. Either is a fine interpretation, and we know by the presence of the Psalms that we can pray with other words.

But we take too lightly the import of Jesus' words, "When you pray, say..." To be sure, there is a danger in praying the Lord's Supper mechanically and thereby never, in fact, praying. But instead of throwing out our Lord's words, we should savor each word of the Lord's Prayer like we're savoring the most exquisite chocolate. On top of this, we seem to value *ex corde*, or from the heart, prayers more than the Lord's Prayer or the Psalms.

There are seven petitions in the Lord's Prayer. When I consider my own prayers and I look at the last two years of prayer requests on our prayer chain, 99% of the prayers are fourth petition prayers. Fourth petition prayers are daily bread prayers which includes everything from health to safety from natural disasters. We totally ignore the other six petitions. This is the danger of *ex corde* prayers: we seem to care more about a person's physical well-being more than we do his eternal spiritual condition.

When we pray for someone's physical healing, we are primarily praying for their spiritual well-being. I'd much rather someone die in the faith than recover from cancer or COVID. If an unbeliever recovers from cancer or COVID and still ignores Jesus, he is really no better off. It's not that we don't pray for people's daily bread, but that we care more about their spiritual health. We remember the other six petitions.

I've been doing something different this last year or so. I picked this up from my pastor in Casper, Wyoming. When I see a prayer request come through our prayer chain, I stop what I'm doing. Then I say the person's name and prayer request. And then I pray the Lord's Prayer for them. I usually do this out loud and I encourage you to do this as well. This also applies really well to your daily prayers. In that section of our hymnal on page 294, it encourages you to pray for certain things each day of the week. For example, we pray for families on Wednesday. So, on Wednesday, you could say out loud the names of families at Grace or in your biological family who've been on your mind. And then pray the Lord's prayer. You don't have to do this every day, but I encourage you to give it a try. But I would encourage you to slow down when you pray the Lord's Prayer. Give yourself time to really hear the words you are saying.

When you slow down and really listen to what your praying, the Lord's Prayer teaches you. Praying the Psalms does this as well. They teach you what is true, good, and beautiful before God. It teaches you other things as well. Let's look at the Introduction:

What is the Introduction?

Our Father who art in heaven.

What does this mean?

With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.

The first thing the Lord's Prayer teaches you is that you're His dear child. Paul puts it like this:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (Gal 4:4-5)

The Sonship of Jesus is natural. He wasn't adopted by God the Father but is God Himself. He is begotten from His Father from eternity. The relationship of Father and Son has always been and always will be. Because Jesus bled and died for our sins, we are made clean from all righteousness and the pre-fall relationship between God and man is restored. That means you become God the Father's dear child in your baptism and Jesus becomes your big brother! Talk about having a big brother who can take on and defeat any bully!

Because we have been adopted into sonship and daughter-ship, we have the right to pray. What an awesome privilege this is! We have the ear of our creator! He is so far beyond us, but He promises to listen to you when you pray! He doesn't abandon you at your birth but becomes personally involved in your life. And He cares about you.

We sin against this introduction in two ways.

First, we act like we're talking to our homeboy Jesus instead of the Prince of Peace. God is the creator and ruler of the universe.

He sustains all things within Himself. Instead of acting with fear and reverence towards God, we treat Him like we would the relatives we really don't like to talk to. We'll talk to them in our own sweet time. God forbid, it's inconvenient! God forbid prayer actually be an imposition upon us! Or we only pray when things are really messed up in our life. It's like only calling your parents when you need money.

May God have mercy on us!

Second, we are afraid to approach our Father in heaven. Our sin weighs us down so that we fear approaching God. It is true that God does not listen to unrepentant sinners. Proverbs says it like this:

*"If one turns away his ear from hearing the law,
Even his prayer is an abomination." (Pr 28:9)*

We only need fear that God isn't listening when we ignore the abundance of forgiveness found in fount, voice, bread, and wine.

Or we think we're not that important. God certainly wouldn't want to talk with me. I'm a nobody, after all. We forget that Christ died for us because we are precious to Him!

May God have mercy on us!

That's one of the reasons the hymn "God's Own Child, I Gladly Say It" is so comforting. Yes, it's hard to sing, but it's so rich with comfort. You are baptized. Jesus paid your full redemption price. You need not fear sin, Satan, or death! You are indeed a child of paradise!

Thanks be to God for His wonderful mercy!

Let's consider the first petition.

What is the First Petition?

Hallowed be Thy name.

What does this mean?

God's name is certainly holy in itself, but we pray in this petition that it may be kept holy among us also.

How is God's name kept holy?

God's name is kept holy when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we, as the children of God, also lead holy lives according to it. Help us to do this, dear Father in heaven! But anyone who teaches or lives contrary to God's Word profanes the name of God among us. Protect us from this, heavenly Father!

This petition teaches us that God's name is precious. It teaches us that our life must match our confession. It teaches us that pure doctrine is a must.

We sin against this petition three ways.

First, we abuse God's name. We take his name in vain. We forget about His name. We don't have it on our lips or in our heart. We do this even though we have the clear warning from God in Exodus:

"The Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain."

The Jews understood this to mean that we're not allowed to say Yahweh, God's personal name, out loud. We ridicule them while at the same time blaspheming His name left and right.

May God have mercy on us!

Second, we live like heathens. Have you seen anyone with a fish on his car act like a jerk? Have you ever seen anyone with a cross around their neck act like a jerk? This is blaspheming God's name.

I really became aware of this when I started wearing clericals on a regular basis. I paid more attention to how I was acting when I was dressed in clericals! I understood on a visceral level that I was being watched! I showed that when I wasn't in clericals, I really didn't care about God's name. I could be a jerk to a waitress, and it was okay. Although the Holy Spirit sure convicted me later! I thought I was just breaking the fifth commandment, but I also broke the second commandment! You do the same thing when you don't care about how you behave or when you feel justified in acting like a jerk!

May God have mercy on us!

Third, we play around with false doctrine. We pretend we won't get burnt. We were taught by our parents not to play around with fire for a very good reason.

You probably know what heresy is. It's doctrine that isn't in agreement with the Apostle's Creed. The Mormons have a very different idea of who Jesus is. They claim that He is a created being and the brother of Satan. They cannot confess the Apostle's Creed. They may pretend to, but the meanings they give the words are very different than true Christianity. You probably do a pretty good job of steering clear of blatant false teaching.

You may or may not know what heterodoxy is. A good definition is this: deviation from accepted or orthodox standards or beliefs. For us, accepted or orthodox standards is expressed in the Book of Concord, also called our confessions. In confirmation you make this vow:

"Do you confess the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, drawn from the Scriptures, as you have learned it from the Small catechism, to be faithful and true?

I do.

Adult converts make a similar vow tying themselves to the Small Catechism as the true confession of Scripture.

Pastors, churches, and our synod make the same vow with the whole Book of Concord.

Anything that deviates from these treasures of the church should be avoided. At all costs.

This means NOT listening to teachers or devotions from other denominations. Roman Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, Nazarenes, Presbyterians, Reformed, Assembly of God, non-denominational churches, Eastern Orthodox all believe in some form of works righteousness. We fought so hard to remove this from our doctrine, yet we so easily let it come back in. And no matter how well you think you know Lutheran doctrine or how well you can clean heterodoxy up, you're inviting false belief into your life. It's dangerous.

Those who fight against counterfeiters are trained NOT by studying false money, but by studying the true thing extensively and thoroughly. They know the true thing so extremely well that any deviance on a counterfeit bill jumps out at them.

This also means NOT listening to Christian radio. There isn't a radio station or your dial that isn't saturated with works righteousness and decision theology. We need to get away from the idea that just because it's Christian, it's okay. Partial lies are much worse than outright lies. Outright lies are caught by our doctrine antennae but partially correct doctrine slips right in and does a lot of damage!

This also means NOT listening to 99.9% of praise music. They are also saturated with works righteousness and decision theology. The catchy music with the bad theology makes it ten times worse.

We need to rediscover the wonderful old Lutheran hymns that have stood the test of time. These do take time to learn and appreciate it, but they are so worth it.

You may be frustrated at what you see as a lack of Lutheran materials for devotions and Bible study. This is a misunderstanding of how to ingest and meditate upon God's life saving word. There are some things out there like the Portals of Prayer that are generally good. Insight into Scripture comes from knowing Scripture and the Holy Spirit. Certainly, learning stuff like history, geography, and customs help us understand Scripture, but the real Teacher of Scripture is God's Holy Spirit.

I wonder how many of us, including myself, could give an overview of each book in the Bible with a summary of how each book fits into the redemptive story of God saving His creation by bleeding and dying for it which is delivered through Word & Sacrament!

May God have mercy on us!

Thanks be to God; He DOES have mercy on us! Which He continues to teach us as we pray the Lord's Prayer.

The Lord's Prayer is God's gracious gift to us. We need to use it daily and often. That doesn't mean we can't pray *ex corde* prayers, but the majority of our praying should be composed of the Lord's Prayer and the Psalms which have been know as the prayer book of the church.

We know that the Lord's Prayer and the Psalms are pleasing to God because He gave us these words.

We know that we are pleasing to God because we are baptized into His precious name!

God's own child, I gladly say it! I'm a child of paradise!