

Conclusion and I.T.C.P.
Deuteronomy 6:4-9; John 15:1-11

This Lent, we've taken a closer look at the Lord's Prayer. As Luther says, "It is the very best prayer, because the true master of prayer, Jesus, composed it and taught it to us."¹ Tonight we conclude this wonderful prayer and look at how to pray in a practical way.

I think it's fair to say that all of us don't pray like we know we need to. I think the disciples ask Jesus how to pray because they saw Jesus go off to pray all the time and weren't sure how best to emulate Him. Prayer is a natural part of the Christian's life. Jesus says, "If you abide in Me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." (Jn 15:7) Prayer is a big part of abiding in Jesus' word and we should do it often and regularly. If you're like me instead of praying often and regularly, you fail often and regularly.

One of the big reasons we've looked at the Lord's Prayer this Lent is to encourage you to pray more often. And especially to pray the Lord's Prayer daily. If you follow the pattern of the Small Catechism, you should pray the Lord's prayer 3-5 times daily depending on how many times you eat. You say it when you get up and when you go to bed and before every meal. Minimally, you should pray it when you wake up and when you go to bed. This way, you start and end your day well. But this brings up a real danger with the Lord's Prayer. There are two things you need to be watchful against when you recite the Lord's Prayer.

The first is the temptation to say the Lord's Prayer by rote and not think about what you're saying. Then you would be guilty of praying like the Gentiles that Jesus warns us about: "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words." (Mt 6:7) No matter how great the words are in your prayer, if you don't think about what you're praying, it's vain babbling and in the least, is not heard by our Father in heave, and, at worst, is dangerous to your faith.

Sadly, many misunderstand Jesus' warning against vain repetition and stop praying the Lord's Prayer all together. They look at their own words, usually drawn from their deceitful hearts, as more precious to God than His only Begotten Son's words! The hubris and pride of such thinking is incredibly sinful. We Christians usually do think more of ourselves than we ought.

¹ Luther, A Simple Way to Pray, pg. 15

When Jesus says, “so you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’” we think that’s great for other Christians but ignore it in our own lives. That’s a great subject for a sermon another day.

I encourage you to say the Lord’s Prayer and other written prayers like the Collect of the week more often. Slow down and really think about what you’re saying.

The second thing to be watchful for is to fall into the trap of thinking you’re gaining merit by praying the Lord’s Prayer often and regularly. You liken it to brushing your teeth daily or working out every other day. You’ve done the “healthy” habit regularly so everything should go okay! That makes sense with oral hygiene or working out, but it’s a different thing altogether with praying. Christ warns us that we will suffer persecution and have to bear a cross like Him, yet we get surprised when testing and temptation come our way. You’re not alone. Saint Peter had to remind the saints he was writing to who were suffering persecution that it’s normal for Christians to suffer like their Lord. In your suffering, the Holy Spirit conforms you to the image of your Lord Jesus Christ.

You are also a priest. I don’t mean you’re in the office of the Holy Ministry which is only for men who have been ordained into the office, but I mean the priesthood of all believers. The big job for priests is to intercede for others. I can’t think of a better definition for prayer: intercession for others. And like all good works, you know what drives your intercession for others: your neighbor’s need! You all receive the prayer requests that are submitted to Grace. You know that some weeks are sparse and some weeks are plentiful in terms of for prayer requests. Jesus reminds us in Matthew and Luke that our Father in heaven already knows what we need (even without our prayers).

I encourage you to pray often and to pray more often when required by those you are praying for.

I guess we should talk about the conclusion! It appears in Matthew’s account but not in Luke’s account. Jesus didn’t just teach once. The stuff that He said in the sermon on the mount in Matthew and in the sermon on the plain in Luke, He said other places. I’m sure He taught the Lord’s prayer with and without the concluding part many times. It’s not a part of Luther’s original Small Catechism. The Roman Catholics have traditionally not included the conclusion in the “Our Father” which is their way of saying the Lord’s Prayer. So, Luther also didn’t include it when he put it in the Small Catechism either.

It's fine to pray the Lord's Prayer with or without it. It's been the practice of most non-Roman Catholics to add the conclusion, so at some point it showed up in the Catechism we have today. All it means is "yes, yes, Lord, it shall be so!" It is faith's response to God's Word which is what the Lord's Prayer is.

I hope this Lent, we've encouraged you to pray the Lord's Prayer more. You can spend the rest of your life plumbing the depths of the Lord's Prayer and you'll never run out of discoveries! I also don't want to discourage you from saying prayers besides the Lord's Prayer. The Psalms are amazing prayers in and of themselves. If you want a master class in Law & Gospel, pray the psalms often and regularly. The Holy Spirit will take you to school!

I also want to give you some practical advice on how to pray. If you think I'm a big grumpy bear on *ex corde*, or from the heart prayers, you're absolutely right! Like dessert, *ex corde* prayers should be rare. But that doesn't mean that there can't be an element of freedom in prayer. That's why I've gotten a surprise for you.

<pick up A Simple Way to Pray>

On the table in the Narthex, you'll see Martin Luther's "A Simple Way to Pray." It's a letter written by Luther to his barber. His barber, like many of us, struggled to pray. He asked Luther for advice. Luther, thankfully, made it a public letter. It's good for all of us to read and meditate upon. This version is helpful as well, because the translator, President Matthew Harrison, formalizes the system that Luther loosely sets up in the letter.

First and foremost, prayer needs to be centered on Scripture. The Small Catechism, drawn directly from Scripture, also fits this category. If you're not involved in a daily devotion centered on the Word of God, repent and start! The Portals of Prayer is okay, but not the best. The devotions are sometimes good and sometimes bad. They are better than nothing and they are definitely much better than other types of Christian devotions. Guess what? If you do Methodist or Baptist or Roman Catholic devotions, you'll start believing like Methodists or Baptists or Roman Catholics.

<pick up Treasury to show everyone>

I think, hands down, the absolute best devotional out there is the Treasury of Daily Prayer. It's based on the Daily Lectionary found in your hymnal.

Two things the Treasury has that's not listed in the Daily Lectionary is a daily Psalm and a daily devotion from the church's history that's stood the test of time.

<pick up bulletin and show page with Daily Devotions>

I print out the daily lectionary with the Psalms in the bulletin so that you don't have to buy a Treasury of Daily Prayer. I love the physical version and think it's worth it's weight in gold, but the absolute important thing is that you're in the Word daily. And for that, all you need is your favorite Bible. On a side note, if you like this sort of thing on your favorite phone or tablet, there's an app available that's actually pretty cheap. That's enough of that. I really should let CPH sell their own products!

We are reading through the New Testament reading this church year and the Psalm. One mistake we fall into is feel like we have to do a ton of reading every day. A little each day goes a long way. So, we'll switch each year whether we read the Old Testament or New Testament reading although you're more than welcome to read both. They really don't take long. If you keep doing the Daily Lectionary readings day in and day out year after year, over time, you'll be amazed at how much Scripture you know! The Treasury gives you a great system to take bite sized chunks out of Scripture every day so you eventually build a great knowledge of Scripture over a long period of time. Now, I'm not saying you'll get to Alma's level, but you can come close!

The Daily Scripture reading provides the basis for your prayer. What verse jumped out at you? What captures your imagination? What seems pressing to you with what's going on in your life? You meditate on that verse and then apply the ITCP method Drs. Luther and Harrison recommend.

- 1) Instruction – what is this verse teaching you? Draw on your knowledge of the Small Catechism and the rest of the Bible to inform your answer. Does it bring up questions you're unsure about? Your pastor loves questions. What does God want you to learn and know from this verse?
- 2) Thanksgiving – what has God provided for you with form this verse? Reorient your thinking to think in terms of God providing for you as a parent cares for a child instead of thinking like an adult. No matter how old you are, you are God's precious child!
- 3) Confession – how have you sinned against this verse? What have you taken for granted? What have you overlooked? What have you outright just ignored?

- 4) Prayer – put all of the preceding three steps into a simple prayer. Orient yourself to pray for others when possible. You are a priest. Who are you praying for?

I've also included a half page order of prayer based on this little booklet.

<hold up *the half-sheet with the order of prayer*>

<*go through* how it works>

You certainly don't have to use this. There's a lot of great little orders of prayer based on the Small Catechism. The Hymnal and The Treasury of Daily Prayer offer "Daily Prayer" orders "For Individuals and Families." CPH even offers a handy laminated trifold with these orders of prayer.

<*show example from the glossy tri-fold*>

You can insert the I.T.C.P. method of prayer into these orders easily enough. Again, it's not important which order you use as long as you use an order often and regularly.

And if that's not enough, sing hymns. Hymn singing is a great way to pray. Every Wednesday, we've sung "Our Father, Who from Heaven Above" which teaches us the Lord's Prayer. The reason we've sung it each week is to aid us in memorizing this wonderful Hymn.

The extra collect from Gerhard tonight sums up why we pray. We pray for a blessed end to this life and a blessed resurrection in the next life. We not only pray that for ourselves but for all of those whom God puts into our life. Your main weapon of warfare is God's Word on your lips also known as prayer. May God continue to bless your prayers as you persevere in the Faith.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.