

The Lord's Prayer and His Answer

In the name of him for whose sake the Father gladly answers our prayers, dear friends in Christ: The holy evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are united in presenting our Lord Jesus as a man of prayer. All of them record how he would often go off alone to spend hours in deep conversation with his heavenly Father, sharing with him some of the close intimacy that Jesus the eternal Son knew with his Father since the world began. I suppose that to a certain extent he did this because only the Father properly understood his predicament as a perfect and holy person immersed in a world of sin and sent to save it. It would be not unlike how those who spend most of their day taking care of small children desperately crave having a real conversation with another living, breathing human adult.

But that's only part of it. The main reason Jesus spent so much time in prayer was that he recognized his absolute dependency. He, better than anyone who's ever lived, knew that he had to look to the Father to provide all things. Our mistake is to think that somehow we have some or all things under our own control. When facing a challenge or some task we think, "No problem. I got this." Really? What have you got that wasn't given to you by God? The truth is that you are dependent upon him for every breath and beat of your heart. All that you are and have come from a continuous stream of his gracious giving, and should he ever withhold any of it even for a moment, you'd be done. Game over. Jesus understood this. And if he who is also eternally God did, how much more should we who are mere creatures?

Noting how much time Jesus devoted to prayer, and perhaps sensing from this their own great need, we heard in today's text how the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray also. He responds by teaching them Luke's version of what we know as the Lord's Prayer – which I'll come back to in a bit. You probably noticed that it's a bit shorter than the more familiar version that appears in Matthew's Gospel; missing, as it does, two of the petitions: "Your will be done" and "Deliver us from evil". For the purposes of this message I'll include them when the time comes even though they don't appear in the text. Jesus gave us them too, so it's okay.

But before we get to it, I want to highlight the rest of what Jesus has to say about prayer in today's lesson. He provides us a glimpse into our heavenly Father's heart, explaining the Lord's overall disposition toward hearing and answering our prayers. And it's not what we might expect. Too often we're inclined to think that he doesn't want to be bothered with all our petty concerns. "This is too trivial a matter to take to the Lord", we might think. "He's got enough on his plate; bigger fish to fry. I'll save my prayers for the things that matter most." Thoughts like these come from a deficient understanding of the greatness of God – like he only has so much time to spend on any one of us. Not true. He's got all the time in the world for you personally, and everybody else. He can do that. It goes with being eternal, all knowing, all powerful, and all those other attributes of God that begin with the prefix "omni". The truth is that the Lord delights in hearing and answering our prayers. It means we're trusting in him and relying on him to take care of us – which is what it means to look to him as our God.

And to highlight the Lord's disposition toward our prayers, Jesus gives the example of a man who needs bread in the middle of the night to serve to an unexpected visitor. He doesn't have any on hand, so he goes and knocks on his neighbor's door, asking if he could spare a few loaves. Jesus asks, "Will [this neighbor] answer, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'?" Now, that might

sound almost reasonable to us in our day and age – who wants to be woken up in the middle of the night? Can't this wait until morning? But to understand Jesus' point you need to know that such a response would have horrified the disciples. They lived in a culture in which hospitality was seen as a cardinal virtue. The disciples could not imagine anyone saying something so outlandishly rude and boorish to a neighbor in need of something so small as a midnight snack. And unfortunately the text is poorly translated here which can lead to misunderstanding. What we heard was the neighbor getting up and giving bread to the guy knocking not for friendship's sake, but because of his impudence. It makes it sound as if the neighbor realizes he won't get any sleep because the guy keeps knocking and won't take no for an answer. But that's not it. What the text actually says is that the neighbor will get up and give the man what he needs due to his "shame-faced-ness"; and it refers not to the man who's knocking, but to the neighbor in bed. What it means is of course he's going to get up and give the guy what he wants. He's got his reputation to protect. If he failed to do so, he'd be instantly be known as the worst creep on the planet. In the same way, the Lord needs to protect his reputation. It would be shameful for him not to be hospitable. His natural inclination is to give his children all that they need. It's no bother to him. He's glad to do it.

So ask, Jesus says. Seek what you want from the Lord. He'll give it to you. Knock on his door. He'll open it to you. And he knows better than anyone how to give you what's best. Again Jesus provides a comparison. "What father among you, if his son asks for a fish will instead give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg will give him a scorpion?" The obvious answer is no father would do that. "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" Jesus concludes.

And he's right, of course; but his conclusion raises another issue. It's the question of what to ask God for in prayer. The problem is we don't recognize what our greatest needs are. We're usually focused on temporal things. We typically ask for stuff that is in the end pretty inconsequential. I mean, think about your prayers. How often does it occur to you to ask for something so great as the Holy Spirit: the Spirit who drives you to repentance for your sin, the Spirit who works in you the faith in Christ that saves, the Spirit who guides you in the Lord's righteous ways and produces in you the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and self control? The Lord wants you to ask him for all things, yes; but he is most eager to give you what's truly and eternally good for you.

And that brings us back to the Lord's Prayer because it's in these petitions that Jesus specifically teaches us what we ought to be asking of the Lord. He begins by telling to address God as Father – for so he is, made so when you were adopted by him in Holy Baptism, by which you were united with Jesus in his death and burial, and raised to new life in him. This is what gives you the confidence to go to the Lord, as Luther says, "as beloved children go their dear father" with their requests.

First we are to ask that God's name be kept holy among us. That is that we would honor his name and use it only in appropriate ways. More to the point (and time for a little review of the catechism) God's name is kept holy when his Word is taught in its truth and purity and we (as his children) lead holy lives according to it. On the other hand, when we distort God's Word or ignore it, sinning with abandon, we drag God's good name through the mud. This we don't want to do. So we pray that our Father keep us from doing so.

Next Jesus teaches us to pray for the coming of God's kingdom. This is both a present and future thing. In the present, God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us his

Holy Spirit. Upon hearing God's Word rightly proclaimed, the Spirit works in us faith in Christ that makes us part of God's kingdom now, members of his Holy Church. And, as I said before, the Spirit produces in us the good fruit that God desires to see in our lives. Ultimately God's kingdom will come on the Last Day when the dead are raised and the faithful inherit the new heaven and earth. And because that is our greatest hope and longing, it's right that we pray for that too.

The third request is that the will of God be done. And what is God's will? That the evil plans and purposes of the devil, the world, and our sinful natures be thwarted, because these are the things that attempt to prevent our hallowing of God's name and the coming of his kingdom to us. God's will is that we be strengthened in the Christian faith and kept firm in his Word.

Fourth Jesus teaches us to ask for our daily bread – which is all the stuff we need to support this body and life. And note that he tells us to ask for just one day's worth of what we need; not for a week, or a year, or to be set for the rest of our lives. No, he would have our eyes fixed on the Lord each and every day to provide only what we need for that day so that our trust and thankfulness would increase.

Fifth we are to ask for the forgiveness of our sins. This too is a daily need – for every day we sin much. And we need to be aware of it, because this is what keeps us looking to Christ and the atonement he made for us on the cross. That's the center of our faith. It's what enables God to forgive us. And it's what enables us to forgive others the sins they commit against us. If God has forgiven them, like he has me, how can I hold anything against them?

Sixth Jesus has us ask that we not be led into temptation – not by God, for he would never do that, but by the unholy trinity of the devil, the world, and our sinful natures. These are the enemies that seek to destroy us by leading us into false belief and shameful sins. They are going to attack us; they always do. We pray that God give us the faith and strength to overcome them.

Finally Jesus teaches us to pray that the Lord deliver us from all evil – which necessarily means that we'll have to experience evil. In this world you're going to face hardship, illness, and disasters of various kinds; people will do bad things to you. It's part of living in this fallen world. We are to pray that the Lord rescue us from such evils according to his plan and purpose, which he will do in his good time. And we know that in the end, he'll rescue us from such evils by taking us through the evil that is death to life eternal. It's odd: sometimes older people – usually those who are living in nursing homes – will ask me, "Pastor, is it okay to pray that the Lord end my life here and take me to be with him in heaven?" The answer is that you pray for that every time you pray in the Lord's Prayer: "Deliver us from evil".

Thus our Lord Jesus teaches us to pray for all that God knows we truly need. And because Jesus gave it to us, we can be sure that this is a perfect prayer, pleasing to our Father in heaven who delights in answering it. To be sure, he's also given us the perfect answer to it. We call it the Lord's Supper. Think about it. God's name is hallowed when we hear his Word and live according to it. Jesus said "Take and eat. This is my body. Take and drink. This is my blood." We hear God's Word and do what he said – and so we keep God's name holy.

God's kingdom comes when he sends his Holy Spirit – which is precisely what he does when you receive Communion. Through his Word and bread and wine he gives you the Spirit who empowers you to believe that what you are actually receiving is Jesus' body and blood, and

that they are uniting you to him and to all the faithful who also part of his body, the Church – God's kingdom on earth.

God's will is done when you commune. What could frustrate the plans and purposes of the enemy more than you kneeling at the rail hallowing God's name and letting his kingdom come to you in the body and blood of Jesus? It's a means by which God strengthens your faith and keeps you firm in his Word – and that is God's good and gracious will for you.

Daily bread? Yes, in communion there's some of that: physical nourishment for your physical body. But more importantly there is the Bread of Life from heaven – the flesh of Jesus – which feeds your soul and gives you life everlasting.

Forgive us our sins. Right. That's what the Holy Supper is all about. The body of Jesus given for you, the blood of Christ shed for you – *for the forgiveness of your sins*. And with the forgiveness you receive from the altar you are equipped to forgive others.

Lead us not into temptation. The Lord's Supper is God's gift to help and empower you to overcome temptation and win the final victory.

And deliver us from evil – which is exactly what Jesus does by giving you his body and blood from his cross of your redemption.

It's all here: the Lord's perfect prayer and his perfect answer to it. Jesus gave us both. Therefore let's ask that we may receive. Let's seek that we may find. And Let's knock so that the Lord may open the door of his heavenly home to us, now and always. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!