

Six Chief Parts Of Luther's Small Catechism. The Lord's Prayer

Text: John 16:23

Suggested Hymns:

420, 424, 215 R&S, 289, 426

- 1) Our Father who art in heaven
- 2) Hallowed be Thy name
- 3) Thy kingdom come
- 4) Thy will be done
- 5) Give us this day our daily bread
- 6) Forgive us our trespasses
- 7) Lead us not into temptation
- 8) But deliver us from evil

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 16:23, ²³ ***“And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

In the Ten Commandments, we learned what kind of a holy life God demands of us. In the Law we also learned that we do not achieve this holiness.

In the Apostles' Creed, which holds forth the Gospel of what God has done and continues to do for us, we learned that God grants us the holy life He requires of us by faith.

Now, in the third chief part of Luther's Small Catechism, the Lord's Prayer, we shall learn how this life of holiness which we can live by faith is readily made available to us by our gracious God.

Prayer is the act of faith by which we acknowledge the Presence of this gracious God in our lives. It is the act of faith by which we receive all of the good gifts He has promised and is ready to bestow on us. It is the act of faith by which we permit the Gospel to express itself in our personal lives.

Prayer is the act of faith by which we acknowledge that we stand in a new relationship to the Father and, because of this, that we also stand in a new relationship to the world and our fellowman.

Prayer is not an act of faith by which we can drag God down to us, but it is the act of faith by which we discover that our holy and almighty God is willing to enter into conversation with us, because He has already made us His children.

All of these features of prayer Luther discovered in the Lord's Prayer, and for this reason he made this prayer the model prayer for the third chief part of the Catechism. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Our Father Who Art in Heaven

The privilege of prayer is no more obvious than when our Lord taught us to say, "*Our Father who art in heaven.*" In his explanation of the introduction to the Lord's Prayer, Luther says that this is the gracious and tender invitation of our dear Lord God to come to Him as dear children go to their dear father.

It was our Lord who taught us so. Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself is that gracious invitation. In Jesus Christ the heavenly Father has already spoken to us. Jesus Christ is the Word of God become flesh. In Him we discover what Word it is that God would always speak to us. It is a gracious Word of forgiveness, of life, and of hope.

In Jesus Christ we discover what the will of God is for us. So it is, that our prayer to God begins on a good note. We do not have to confront our God in the fear that there is nothing to talk about, or in the anxiety that He will not be ready to listen to our problems.

The conversation has already begun. God has spoken to us in the most tender, gracious, and beautiful manner in which He can. Now we can begin in faith, confidence, and hope, because by what our Father has said to us in Christ, He is not only inviting us to prayer, He is urging us to pray.

2. Hallowed Be Thy Name

In the First Petition of the Lord's Prayer we pray, "*Hallowed be Thy name.*" Luther noted in his explanation of the petition that God's name is holy in itself, but what we are praying for is that God's name may be kept holy among us.

When Luther goes to explain how we do this, he is thinking of the prohibitions of the Second Commandment. The Commandment forbids us to curse, swear, use witchcraft, lie, or deceive by God's name. We are not to lead people astray by God's name. False teaching about God dishonours God's name. Those who do violence to God's Word do not hallow His name.

Nor does one honour God's name when he curses, swears, or now, as has become so popular, to use witchcraft - that is, being involved in the occult.

But we keep God's name holy among us when we rely on it, call on Him, pray, and give praise to His name. God's name is never more honoured than when His Gospel is preached. We honour God's name when we preach and teach that He is a gracious and merciful God who helps us in all our perils and every time of need.

We do God's name the greatest service when we live as though we can completely rely on God and come to Him with our every need. God has made His name known to us through His Son so that we come to depend on His name for every good gift in our lives.

Thus when we pray, "*Hallowed be Thy name,*" we are to ask not only that God would keep us from abusing His name, but that He enable us regularly to pray and call on the good and gracious name He has revealed to us. In short, we are to live by God's name knowing by faith who He really is.

3. Thy Kingdom Come

When we pray the Second Petition, "*Thy kingdom come,*" we recognise a similarity with the First Petition. Luther noted that just as the name of God is holy in itself and we must still pray that it may be holy among us, so the kingdom of God comes whether we pray or not.

Yet we must pray this petition ardently that God's kingdom may also come among us. We should so pray, because God's kingdom is His rule. God rules over all the kingdoms of the earth. But also God rules now in our hearts through His Word and Sacraments.

And God's kingdom will also come when He comes to establish His eternal kingdom of righteousness for those whom He now rules in grace. In this petition

we are praying that God would so rule the world that He might rule in our hearts to make us a part of His eternal kingdom.

In the first petition we are praying for the rightful use of God's Word, and here we are praying that the Word might bear fruit in our lives. We are praying that we may truly have faith in our hearts in Him who is our King now and who will also be King in the revelation of eternal life.

4. Thy Will Be Done

There are enemies of the kingdom of God to be sure. The world is filled with obstacles to the rule of God, and the demonic forces are still loose in the world who desire to hinder and frustrate God's rule at every turn.

However, we cannot discount our own stubborn wills which can so easily resist the good and gracious will of God. Again, we know that God's will is eventually done in the world in spite of the opposition which God receives.

What we pray in the Third Petition is that the good and gracious will of God be done in us, in our lives. We pray that God would destroy all hindrances and obstacles to the performance of His will in us. And we are also praying that God would break our sinful will and that we may learn to submit to His good rule in us.

By this petition we pray that our faith may be an act of trusting obedience to God's will, which we know in Christ is always the best that can be done for us. By this petition we surrender our wills to God to make our wills one with His that He might have His way with us.

5. Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

When we pray the petition for daily bread, we are apt to think that we are praying more in our accustomed way. Our prayer habits tend to concentrate more on the things we need for daily sustenance than on the spiritual concerns this prayer brings.

However, Luther saw that this brief petition prays for much more. For one, he noted that God gives daily bread without our prayer even to the wicked. What we pray for here is also a spiritual concern. We are praying that we might lead a thankful life in which we see all the gifts of God as occasions to thank Him for His goodness.

In our age of materialism we have sufficient evidence that affluence without thankfulness is a curse. Yet thankfulness in the poorest of circumstances is a blessing. Luther also understood that this petition is for more than what you can eat or what you can wear.

We are praying for all that God gives to sustain life, including good government and peace. This petition, he said, is not only for good gifts but against those things that hinder God's gift of bread to us. We are praying against shortages, famine, bad weather, bad government, and evil men who disturb God's economy that delivers our daily bread out of the goodness of His hand.

6. Forgive Us Our Trespases

In the Fourth Petition we prayed for daily bread because our body cannot get along without it. In the Fifth Petition, Luther says, that we cannot live our lives without sinning. Because of this our Lord taught us to pray for our greatest need of all, "*Forgive us our trespases.*"

God is perfectly willing to forgive our sins. He paid the price for them. He gives us the Word and the Sacraments in which He offers us forgiveness. Yet He also knows our state and condition. He knows that we need to acknowledge daily that we are the kind of people that we are.

No matter how holy or pious we may feel, we are reminded that we must confess, "*Forgive us our trespases.*" Or if we feel the opposite, that is, if we feel burdened of conscience or stuck with our sin and guilt, our Lord commands us to pray the same.

This petition is given both to arouse our consciences to our need for God's forgiveness, and to calm our hearts when we do confess. To this we add, "*as we forgive those who trespass against us.*" Luther calls this a great sign which God has given to us. All we have to do is to look to our neighbours to see how they need our forgiveness. Then when we forgive them in the name of our Lord, we have the sure sign that our God has also forgiven us.

So we learn in this petition, in spite of what we see in ourselves and what God sees in us, that God forgives us and we can joyfully forgive our neighbours.

7. Lead Us Not Into Temptation

To pray lead us not into temptation should be easy for us, for daily we are confronted with the temptations of our own flesh. The easy rationalisations of our own heart are designed to convince us that we have a right to this sin or that.

We like to place ourselves above the Law of God. Likewise the temptations of the world are those that would comfort us when we do wrong, or when we find solace in the way the world thinks about things. The temptations of the devil are those which attempt to convince us that we do not have to believe God's promises or to obey His Law.

Certainly, none of these temptations come from God, but we pray in this petition that God would protect us from all these temptations and that He would give us the power to overcome them.

He becomes our Defender against those things that would destroy us. We must not say that we can do this sin or that, because our God is ready to forgive us. However, God is ready and eager to help us overcome whatever is set in opposition to His good grace.

8. But Deliver Us From Evil

Luther asks, "*Who can count all the evils?*" How can we list all the trials, temptations, troubles, and perils that we must face in a lifetime? Here our Lord Himself invites us to rely on His heavenly Father and ours to deliver us out of every trouble that comes to perplex us in life, and finally when our last "*hour has come to grant us a blessed end and take us from this vale of tears to Himself in heaven.*"

What a power our Lord has placed in our hands and on our lips and in our heart with this gift of His prayer. Everything that God has asked and required of us He has made known in His Law. What He has accomplished for us we learned in the Apostles' Creed.

In the prayer He has given us He shows us how we can solicit His help and gain the full benefits of His grace and power. In all of the petitions we learn that we can bring all of our needs and cares to Him.

There is much in life that we shall never understand, and many of our hardships and temptations we cannot explain. However, we can take comfort in the fact that the God who permits us to experience trials, invites us to experience

His mercy and love to help us overcome anything that we may have to endure.
We could ask for no more. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and
minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.