

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Last Wednesday we finished our series on the Creed. Throughout those weeks, we learned that God does not withhold anything from us. He has given us Himself and His entire creation. And not only that, He gave us the Gospel: His only-begotten Son. And He gave us the Holy Spirit so we would know the Son of God and sanctify us through Word and Sacrament to keep us in the one true Christian faith.

Because the Father gave His gifts by creation, the Son by redemption, the Holy Spirit by sanctification, we are now able to run to the Triune God and ask Him for blessings with all boldness and confidence as dear children ask their dear father as He invites us to pray to Him.

But what does it mean to pray? Quite simply, to pray is to ask. This is the heart and core of prayer. Now this may sound like we are asking God, "gimme, gimme, gimme." It may sound like we are self-centered and selfish. But when it comes to our relationship with God, prayer actually reveals something of our standing before God. We never don't need everything from God. We are never independent from Him.

In our series on the Creed, we learned that everything we are and have comes from God Himself. You and I didn't choose to be born. We did not earn or merit it. God did not owe it to us. Instead, everything we have is a gift. We, you and me, exist solely as gifts of God. And so, our life and our lives are completely dependent upon God. We live from the gifts of God. That's what it means to be creatures and not the Creator. So, you and I will never not need food and drink, family and friends, good weather, health for our bodies. And so, God tenderly invites us to ask, and to receive all these gifts, and many more, with thanksgiving.

At the same time, we are also fallen creatures. We are sinful creatures. You and I stand before God always needing to be cleansed from sin, and constantly restored to God's favor and grace. Yet, even as sinners, God approaches us and tenderly invites us to call Him "Father." He extends His hand so that we may take it. We can call God "Our Father," because of Jesus, who is our Brother. So, as long as we live in this fallen world, there's not a moment when we do not need to ask for God's forgiveness and His favor. And we are bold to ask, because of Jesus Christ.

So, what does Jesus give us in the prayer that He has taught us? He has given us seven petitions. Seven requests. Seven weapons against all the spiritual warfare that Satan can throw at us. Tonight, we will look at the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer.

First, "*Hallowed be Thy Name.*" God's Name has been given to us. God gave us His Name when you were baptized in His Name, which makes you His child. So, through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, God unites us to Him.

Now that we have been made His child, what does it mean to hallow the name of God? Well, this goes back to the Second Commandment, which we went over last Lenten season. The purpose of the Second Commandment is so that we do not curse, swear, use satanic arts, or deceive by His Name. So, God's Name is hallowed when we call upon Him, pray, praise, give thanks, tell others about Him in how He is merciful and helps us in peril and otherwise.

So, the First Petition in the Lord's Prayer is explained by the Second Commandment. In short, when one teaches and lives as a Christian, then that person – *you and me* – will not curse, swear, use satanic arts, or deceive by His Name.

So, in this petition, as Luther says, we can pray against all who preach, teach, and believe falsely, who persecute the Word of God by violence, and against those who lie, deceive, revile, and curse against us, so that His Name may become holy, that the whole world may not curse and swear by His Name, but rather pray and call upon Him, according to the Second Commandment.

Now to the second petition, the second request, the second weapon: "*Thy kingdom come.*"

The second need which drives us to prayer is that we pray that God's kingdom may come. Jesus is teaching us to pray so that we may be a part of the kingdom. But what is meant by "kingdom"? What exactly is the Father's kingdom, God's kingdom, the kingdom of heaven?

God's kingdom comes in two ways: first, here, through His Means of Grace – *His Word and Sacraments*, and secondly, that in the future, eternal life is given to us.

The kingdom of heaven has been granted to us through the King of kings, our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the King of righteousness and life against the devil, sin, eternal death, and all evil. He has given us His Holy Word, that it may be preached, in order that we might believe in Him and live holy lives.

Therefore, we pray in this petition that the Holy Spirit may go out into the world with power, that many may come into His kingdom now – *through the Church* – and learn to believe and thus be partakers of redemption from sin, eternal death, and hell in the life to come.

The third request and weapon in the Lord's Prayer is "*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*"

Prayer is not an easy task. Prayer isn't easy, because through prayer, we actually place ourselves on the front line in the battle between God and Satan. You see, the moment the Holy Spirit enters our hearts and kindles faith in God, at that moment we then turn to God crying, "*Our Father, who art in heaven...*" At that moment, we also turn our backs on Satan. And Satan considers that a declaration of war. Nothing infuriates him more than to have someone liberated from his prison and returned home as a child and heir of God.

So, when you pray, "*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,*" you have declared war on Satan. For Satan wants to prevent the will of God from being done. The devil cannot endure that the Word should be preached and the people accept it, so he sends his poisoned arrows: the fallen world and our sinful flesh, so that those would hinder God's will.

And what is God's will? That "***everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day***" (John 6:40).

Because of Satan's hatred for God and His salvation, he holds nothing back. He undermines the Name and Word of God. He even seeks to keep us from receiving our daily bread, the necessities of life, in peace and thanksgiving.

In these first three petitions, we pray that God's Name be hallowed through His Word and also in us, that we adhere to His Word in His kingdom now and in heaven, and that God would hinder those who oppose His will. As Luther says, until next week "let this be sufficient for this time on these first three petitions."

We do not stand alone in this battle; we do have Someone who goes into the battle ahead of us and fights for us: Jesus Christ. May Christ's victory over Satan be also our victory. In the meantime, continue to pray to God for all your needs, for prayer is the greatest weapon against Satan. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +