

Lord, teach us to pray

One of His disciples said to Him: Lord, teach us to pray, just as also John taught his disciples. Lk. 11:1.

The request of one of the Lord's disciples: "Lord, teach us to pray," did not happen by accident. Jesus Himself had prayed, and had even concluded His prayer, in the presence of His disciples. It must have been a memorable prayer. For it awakened in the heart of this disciple the wish that the Lord might teach him, and his fellow disciples, to also pray like that.

This wish was strengthened by the remembrance of John the Baptizer, who had taught his disciples to pray. Some of the disciples of the Lord themselves were previously of course disciples of the Baptizer, and were directed by him to Jesus – the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.

The wish of the disciples that the Lord might teach them to pray should also remain the wish and the petition of all disciples of the Lord until the end of days. Jesus Himself must teach us to pray. He also did so during the time of His earthly sojourn. And still today He, without ceasing, teaches His own to pray through His Word, as it is laid out in the Holy Scriptures. In the coming weeks we want to contemplate how Jesus continuously still does this.

Lord Jesus, through Your Word and example, teach us also how we should properly and God-pleasingly pray. Amen.

Where should we pray?

When you pray, go into your little closet . . . and pray to your Father in secret. Mt. 6:6.

St. Paul writes, "Thus I desire that men pray in every place" (1 Tim. 2:8). There is no place in the world where a Christian cannot pray when the need to pray arises. Nevertheless, there are places that possess a special place for prayer. One such place is God's house, where the children of God gather to hear God's Word and to pray.

Also, however, a proper place above all others is the closet/little cubicle where a Christian can speak undisturbed and undistracted to His heavenly Father, and can pour out his heart to Him. That's why the Lord says: "When you pray, go into your little closet and shut the door and pray to your Father in secret." Jesus Himself of course did not have a little closet built by man. His little chamber was a lonely mountain and a place in the Palestinian desert (Mt. 14:23).

We, who are so much richer in earthly possession than He was, should diligently enter into our little chamber and pray to our Father in secret. And our Father, Who sees the hidden, shall reward us publicly.

Heavenly Father, grant that I frequently enter into my closet to pray, and hear my prayer; In Jesus' Name. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: Introduction (I)

You therefore should pray like this: Our Father in Heaven! Mt. 6:9.

As Jesus, at the request of His disciples, instructed them how to pray, He said: "You therefore should pray like this: 'Our Father in Heaven!'"

We Christians have become so accustomed to it, that we completely fail to notice the miraculous wonder of this address. We are to say to God: "Our Father!" How is that possible? He is the eternal, exalted above everything, God. We on the other hand are dust and ashes. How dare we call Him our Father? In addition, we are poor, miserable sinners who frequently have transgressed God's Commandments – and still do.

However, it is the Lord Christ, the Son of God Himself, who bids us to call God our Father. The Holy Scriptures shows two reasons why we should call upon God as our Father. The first is that God Himself has created us. "Have we not all *one* Father? Has not *one* God created us?" (Mal. 2:10). The fact that we as sinful human beings nevertheless are God's creatures gives us in a general sense a right to call the Most High our Father. However there still is a far more important reason. We will deal with that tomorrow.

Thanks be to You, God, that we may call You Father, for in Christ we are Your reconciled children. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: Introduction (II)

Therefore you should pray like this: Our Father in heaven! Mt. 6:9.

We sinful human beings may call God our Father because He is our Creator and we are His creatures.

However, there is yet another more glorious reason to call Him Father. We Christians are God's children through our re-birth. Through Word and Sacrament the Holy Spirit has brought us to believe in Christ. About such people the Scripture says: "As many as received Him, to them He gave the power to become God's children who believe on His name. Who are born not from blood, nor by the will of the flesh, nor by the will of a man, but rather they are born of God" (John 1:12-13). It is something really great to be a child of God. Filled with astonishment, St. John cries out: "See, what a love the Father has shown us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1).

That's why we Christians have not received a spirit of servitude so that we have to be afraid. Rather, we have received a child-like Spirit whereby we faithfully cry out: Abba, dear Father! (Rom. 8:15).

Dear Father in heaven, thanks be to You that I for Christ's sake may trustingly call You Father. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: Introduction (III)

Christ teaches His disciples to address God as our Father. However, He additionally adds on the most important words: "in heaven."

With these words He presents God as our Father in stark contrast to earthly fathers. An upright, loving earthly father is something great. He faithfully looks after his own. No effort is too great, no sacrifice too burdensome if it pertains to the welfare of his children. However he always remains an earthly father, limited in the capabilities to provide for his children. With all his fatherly love and faithfulness, he also remains a poor sinner who in the pursuit of his fatherly duties neglects many things.

How different our Father in heaven! He fails in nothing that pertains to His children upon earth. He is not limited either in being aware of the needs of His children upon earth, or in the capability to help them out according to their needs. This is the Father in heaven. Jesus teaches His own to pray to Him. Oh how trustingly we should then turn to Him and pray: "Our Father in heaven!"

Our Father in heaven, You care for all Your children upon earth. Also take care of me, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: First Petition

Hallowed be Your Name. Mt. 6:9.

When mankind, also children of God, come before God in prayer, as a rule they pray for things that pertain to their own person or for things that pertain to one of their loved ones. Jesus however teaches His disciples to pray first for something that pertains to God Himself: "Hallowed by Your Name." Here on earth each person and everything has its own name. And the name itself designates that thing or person. God also has a name, and this name designates God Himself. Jesus teaches us to pray: "Hallowed be Your name."

Luther explains this petition in the Small Catechism: "God's Name is indeed holy of itself; but we petition in this prayer that it also be holy among us." To "hallow" here indicates as much as to keep holy. This petition and the Second of the holy Ten Commandments belong together. The Second Commandment says: "You shall not uselessly use the Name of your God." We uselessly use God's Name when we curse, swear, practice witchcraft, lie or deceive by His Name. The Name of God is hallowed when we call upon it in need, praise and give thanks.

Dear heavenly Father, keep me from misusing Your holy Name. Help me to hallow it, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: Second Petition (I)

Your kingdom come. Mt. 6:10.

The Holy Scriptures often speak about God's kingdom. The children of God among the nation of the Jews waited longingly for the coming of the kingdom of God (Lk. 23:1). And Jesus Himself taught His disciples to pray: "Your kingdom come."

But what is the kingdom of God? Concerning this question the thinking has always gone off in opposite directions. The earthly minded among Jesus' fellow citizens understood the kingdom of God as an earthly kingdom, in which the Jewish nation would be free from the yoke of the Romans so that they could live amidst a perfect earthly prosperity. This definition is false; it also had serious consequences for the Jewish people. In the Christian church many, also great, teachers have defined the kingdom of God as simply the church. And of course, kingdom of God and church belong tightly knit together. However, the kingdom of God is not the church. The kingdom of God is according to Christ's description something inward within a person (Lk. 17:21).

Actually the most excellent description of the God's kingdom is this: The kingdom of God is the gracious rule of God in the heart of His believers. That's what we pray for in the Second Petition.

Dear heavenly Father, by grace rule and reign also in my heart; in Jesus' Name. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: Second Petition (II)

Your kingdom come. Lk. 11:2.

The kingdom of God, we heard yesterday, is the gracious rule of God in the heart of the believers. Therefore when we pray: "Your kingdom come," we petition God that He Himself would enter into our heart, in order to establish His throne there, and by grace to rule there.

But do we actually wish that? Do we actually – so to say – abandon our regime, and allow God to rule and reign over it? By nature no person wants that. He wants to rule and reign himself. However we no longer are what we were by nature. Through Word and Sacrament we were called to repentance. We have acknowledged our miserable sin that rebels against God, and itself wants to rule and reign. In Christ, our Savior, we have found forgiveness. By contrite repentance and faith we have experienced the new birth that the Holy Scriptures speak of.

Now we have become another person. Instead of wanting to be a self-ruler, we petition God daily: "Your kingdom come. Come dear God, enter into my heart and rule and reign over it by grace." This is what we ask for in the Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer.

Dear God, establish your throne also in my heart and rule it according to your will. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: Third Petition (I)

Your will be done on earth as in heaven. Mt. 6:10.

If we understand the kingdom of God to mean God's reign in the heart and in the life of God's children, then the Third Petition of the Lord's Prayer follows the Second quite naturally. We thus pray in the Third Petition that the reign and rule of God may consequently proceed – and the Lord actually says: “upon earth as in heaven.”

In heaven the will of God takes place at all times without hindrance. For in heaven first of all live the holy angels, who did not follow Satan when he rebelled against God and misled a throng of angels in disobedience against God. The holy angels therefore serve God at all times in perfect obedience.

In heaven there also live the blessed saints, whose soul through a blessed death already is with God in heaven. They have obtained the refuge of the free city “where sin cannot enter in, nor can anything assail them.” With the holy angels the blessed constantly do the will of God. The temptation towards disobedience and sin can no longer assail them. That's why the will of God is done perfectly in heaven, and we pray that it likewise may be done by us upon earth.

Lord, grant me Your Spirit, so that I do Your will like the angels and the saints in heaven do, for the sake of Christ. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: Third Petition (II)

Your will be done upon earth as in heaven. Lk. 11:2.

In the Third Petition of the Lord's Prayer Christ teaches us to pray that the will of God be done upon earth as in heaven – where the holy angels and the blessed saints perfectly fulfill the will of God. This Petition is very necessary, because on earth there are three that want to oppose the will of God and seek to hinder it.

The first is the will of the Devil, the enemy of God and mankind. The Devil can do nothing else. He must oppose the will of God and seek to hinder His work. In the words of Peter, he goes “about like a lowing lion, and seeks whom he might swallow up and devour.” A second will that opposes God's will upon earth is the will of the world. In unbelief they go their way, and by their example pose a constant danger to Christians. Upon earth there is finally the will of the flesh, the Old Adam, the sinful nature that still remains in the heart of Christians.

Devil, world, and flesh! These three enemies, however, the Lord Jesus victoriously conquered by His self-sacrifice upon Golgatha. With His help we can overcome them.

Dear God, break and hinder the evil will of the Devil, the godless world and our sinful flesh, so that Your will be done upon earth. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: Third Petition (III)

Your will be done on earth as in heaven. Lk. 11:2

Three wills set themselves and prop themselves up against the good and holy will of God: the will of the Devil, the will of the fallen world, and the will of the flesh within human beings.

Children of God are reborn and are guided by God's Spirit. Unfortunately however a residue of the sinful nature that was born in them also still remains within the reborn. We call this residue the *Old Adam*, because he is inborn into all humans from Adam on. The Scripture often calls him "the flesh." St. Paul laments over this: "I am in the flesh, sold to sin... I know that in me, i.e., in my flesh, lives no good thing. I desire to do what is good, but I am unable to do it" (Rom. 7:14,18).

Serious Christians – with the Apostle Paul – lament the sinful corruption that dwells within us. They do not seek to deny it – as actually many that want to be Christian do, to their destruction. Devout Christians battle against the sinful lusts. For "those who belong to Christ, crucify their flesh along with its lusts and desires" (Gal. 5:24).

Dear God, grant me Your Holy Spirit, so that I crucify my flesh along with its lusts and desires; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: Third Petition (IV)

My Father, if it is possible, let this cup depart from Me. Nevertheless not as I will, rather as You will. Mt. 26:39.

Christ teaches us to pray: "Your will be done." But what about if it were to be God's will to require something very difficult from us? God does this at times. For the salvation of sinful mankind, God once laid the sin of the world upon His only-begotten Son and allowed Him to be crucified for our sake. Under this burden the Son of God quivered and despaired in Gethsemane and pled: "My Father, if it is possible, take this cup from Me." However He obediently added on: "Yet not as I will, rather as You will."

The same heavenly Father at times also requires – for our own good – difficulty from us. From one person he takes a beloved spouse or a precious child. Upon another person He lays an incurable disease and allows him to pass away under inexpressible pain. When that happens, the Christian goes to his 'Gethsemane' and pleads: "My Father, if it is possible, take this cup from me." However ultimately – after lengthy agonizing prayer – he learns to say with Christ: "Yet not as I will, rather as You will." God's will be done.

Dear God, should You require something difficult from me, then teach me to say: "Your will be done." Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: Fourth Petition (I)

Give us today [this day] our daily bread. Mt. 6:11.

In the holy Lord's Prayer Christ teaches us to pray that God provide us our daily bread.

The Holy Scriptures however also repeatedly teach that a man should earn his daily bread through labor. After the Fall into sin God said to Adam: "By the sweat of your face you shall eat your bread, until you once more become dust from which you were taken" (Gen. 3:19). The Psalmist declares: "Our lives last for seventy years; and, if it comes to that, eighty years. And if it has been delightful, it still has been toil and labor" (Ps. 90:10). The Apostle Paul chastises the Thessalonians because many among them did not want to work: "If anyone will not work, he shall also not eat. For we hear that some among you live disorderly and don't work. Instead they promote meddling. However we order such, and admonish them through our Lord Jesus Christ, that they in a quiet manner work and eat their own bread" (2 Thess. 3:10-12).

The command to work and the petition – "Give us today our daily bread" – belong together.

**Dear God, give me the strength and mindset to diligently work and yet to pray: "give us this day our daily bread."
Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer: Fourth Petition (II)

Give us this day our daily bread. Mt. 6:11.

God desires that man through honorable work earn his daily bread. And yet Christ teaches us to pray: "Give us this day our daily bread." How can this make any sense?

We petition God that He would provide us with daily bread, since without his blessing all our labor would be in vain. If God did not give sunshine and rain the farmer could work himself to death, but his labor would be in vain. However a man seeks to earn his daily bread, if God does not lay His blessing upon the labor it will remain unsuccessful. "If the Lord does not build the house, those who build it labor in vain" (Ps. 127:1).

That's why we Christians, in keeping with God's command, should faithfully pursue our calling, and work with all diligence, for as long as God gives us the opportunity and provides us the necessary strength of body and spirit. And as we eat our bread by the sweat of our brow, we should still diligently pray: "Give us this day our daily bread," and thankfully receive it from God, and constantly remember that He in Christ Jesus provides us with bread for the soul.

Dear God, help me so that I at all times thankfully receive my daily bread as a gift for You. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: Fifth Petition (I)

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Mt. 6:12.

This is indeed a necessary petition for Christians. Properly understood, it contains a confession of sins. Human beings – also the old Adam in Christians – find it quite difficult to confess that one is a sinner. Far too eagerly we do what Adam did after the Fall into sin and seem to shift the blame for our guilt upon someone else. But that does not help us. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

That's why it is quite necessary that we pray: “Forgive us our debts,” our sins. Were God not to forgive us, we then would have to die in our sins and be eternally damned. But thanks be to God! God forgives penitent sinners their debts, for He has laid our sins on His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. And Christ paid for our debts upon the cross with His bitter suffering and death. So now He allows repentance and forgiveness of sins to be preached in His Name among all nations. That's why we confidently pray: “Forgive us our debts.”

Dear God, forgive me also my debts since my Savior has paid them on the cross. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: Fifth Petition (II)

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Mt. 6:12.

We petition God that He would forgive our debts, “as we forgive our debtors.” Are we here petitioning God that He should deal with us as we deal with our debtors?

That indeed dare not be the case. We would rather understand this with Luther. He explains this Petition as follows. “We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look upon our sins, nor on their account deny such a prayer; for we are worthy of nothing that we pray for – nor have we deserved that He hear us. Instead we petition that He would grant it all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and well deserve nothing but punishment.” Then Luther continues with his explanation: “Thus we of course in turn also want to heartily forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.”

So then, it is not: we forgive first, and then God also forgives us. Rather, God first forgives us out of sheer grace for the sake of Christ, and then we also learn to forgive our debtors. God grant that we – who have experienced His forgiveness – also learn to forgive our debtors.

Dear God, forgive me my sins for the sake of Christ, and teach me to forgive my debtors. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: Fifth Petition (III)

When you stand and pray, forgive where you hold anything against someone. Mk. 11:25

“Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,” we pray in the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer. Here we promise our heavenly Father that just as He forgives us our debts, we also want to forgive our debtors. Promising is easy, however keeping it often becomes very difficult for us sinful humans.

That's why it frequently happens that people – who regard themselves as Christians – live in enmity with relatives and neighbors, and they stubbornly refuse to forgive them their alleged failures. Such conduct strikes down the command of the Savior Who commands us: “When you stand and pray, forgive where you hold anything against someone, in order that also your Father in heaven forgive you your failures.” And He adds on the earnest warning: “If you however will not forgive, so also your Father, who is in heaven, will not forgive your failures.”

Thus anyone who will not forgive his neighbor locks himself out from God's forgiveness, and will ultimately die in his sins.

Dear God, teach me the difficult skill of forgiving my debtors like You forgive me; for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: Sixth Petition (I)

And lead us not into temptation. Mt. 6:13

How are we to understand this Petition? Does God stand beside us with the suspicion that He might lead us into temptation? Most certainly not! St. James writes: "Let no one say when he is tempted that he was tempted by God. For God is not a tempter to evil. He tempts nobody. Instead each person is tempted when he is pulled and lured by his own lust" (Ja. 1:13-14).

That's why Luther also explains this Petition like this: "God indeed tempts no one. But we pray in this petition that God would guard and protect us so that the Devil, the world and our flesh not deceive us nor mislead us into unbelief, doubt and other great shame and vice." In this world we are constantly confronted with temptations to sin. The Devil, the hostile to God world, and our sinful flesh see to that. When we therefore pray: "Lead us not into temptation," we thus ask that God stand beside us amidst the manifold temptations that we encounter, so that "even though we thereby become vexed, we nevertheless finally overcome and to retain the victory."

Dear God, help me to overcome all temptations of the Devil, the world and my flesh. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: Sixth Petition (II)

And lead us not into temptation. Lk. 11:4.

St. James assures us: "God is not a tempter to evil; He tempts no one." Nevertheless we read, Gen. 22:1: "After this God tempted Abraham." How are we to understand this? There not only are temptations to sin; there also are wholesome temptations. God tempts His own when He puts them to the test. Abraham had sired his own son in old age. He loved his son extraordinarily. Had this love of Abraham damaged his regard for God? Did he love Isaac more than God?

God puts him to the test. He orders him: "Take Isaac, your only son – whom you love, and go into the land of Moriah and sacrifice him as a burnt offering upon a mountain to which I will direct you." That was a severe temptation. Most certainly after much agony, Abraham went ahead and carried out God's command. He withstood the test, and not only kept his son again, but he also received a special blessing. So also God can at times tempt us, putting us to the test. God grant that we may withstand the test like Abraham once did.

Dear God, if You want to put us to the test, then give us the strength to withstand the test; through Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: Seventh Petition (I)

But deliver us from evil. Mt. 6:13.

The Greek word that Luther translates with “evil” means burdensome hardships of every kind. That’s why Luther explains this Petition: “We pray in this petition, as the sum of all, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from all sorts of evil of body and soul, goods and honor. And when at last our final hour comes that He provide us a blessed end and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.”

In this world we are surrounded by evils of every kind – evils of the body: illness, weakness; evils of the soul: discouragement, a guilty conscience. To this add on greed for money and goods, as well as evil for one’s reputation when one is unjustly accused. God allows evils of this kind to confront His own in this world for their own good. That’s why we must endure them when we encounter them. However, we do not gladly suffer them. That’s why Christ teaches us to pray: “Deliver us from evil,” no matter what kind it is. And we confidently believe that God – Who in His wisdom allows evil to confront us – will, when He has sufficiently tested us, deliver us from it. For Christ has already rescued us from sin.

**Dear God, also rescue me from every evil which, according to Your wise counsel, encounters me in this world.
Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer: Seventh Petition (II)

But deliver us from evil. Lk. 11:4.

According to Luther's explanation of the Seventh Petition, we here not only pray that God would "deliver us from every evil of body and soul, goods and reputation." But also that He would "finally, when our last hour has come, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of misery to Himself in heaven."

A person often regards death as the greatest of evils that encounter him in this world. No person can avoid death. The services of a good physician and a sensible lifestyle can of course oftentimes postpone death for a length of time. But ultimately death requires its sacrifice, for – as an old saying puts it, "No grass grows upon death." Also Christians have to die. However for Christians death is something different than for the children of this world. They know their Savior – Who by His death has redeemed/rescued them from sin and death.

Therefore they also now longer need to fear death, for it brings them the final deliverance from evil. And so we pray that God would "finally give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of misery to Himself in heaven."

Dear God, for Jesus' sake give me also a blessed end. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: Conclusion

For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Mt. 6:13

This conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, which Protestant Christians include in the norm of the prayer, is written in Luther's Bible (Mt. 6:13). It was written in the Greek text that Luther used in translating the New Testament. In the ancient New Testament manuscripts – which have been discovered since Luther's time – these words are of course not found. One assumes that a Christian transcriber, out of pious insight from David's prayer in 1 Chron. 29:11-13, inserted it here into the Greek text.

Be that as it may, the words have imbedded themselves into Protestant Christendom. Catholic Christians on the other hand pray the Lord's Prayer without this conclusion. The words with which we conclude the holy Lord's Prayer are words of faith. They acknowledge that the kingdom does not belong to us, but to God, that He has the power to hear our prayers. And finally they give God the glory. His is the glory forever.

Dear God, hear us when we pray the holy Lord's prayer, and grant our prayers, through Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

What does Amen mean?

Truly [original text: Amen], until heaven and earth pass away, not the teeniest letter nor a single dot shall pass away from the Law until everything is done. Mt. 5:18.

How often Christians hear the little word ‘Amen’! Every sermon concludes with Amen. Every prayer – whether in church or in a little closet – is concluded with this little word. What does Amen mean? Does it merely tell us that the sermon is over and the prayer has ended? No! Amen is a meaningful word. To the question: What does Amen mean? Luther answers it thusly: “This means that I should be certain that these petitions are pleasing/acceptable to our Father in heaven, and are heard by Him; for He Himself has commanded us to pray in this way and has promised to hear us. Amen, amen, which means ‘yes, yes, it shall be so.’”

The word Amen is a word of certainty and faith. When a preacher concludes his sermon with ‘Amen’, he thereby declares that he has preached God’s Word. When a prayer concludes his prayer with amen, he thereby confesses that he is convinced that God has heard his prayer. That’s why we should be careful not to pronounce the word amen thoughtlessly, but instead use it to confess that we have prayed with trust in God and steadfastly await God’s hearing our prayer.

“...Thus in Thy name and at Thy word we say: Amen. Oh, hear us Lord! (ILH #458, v. 9.)

Giving thanks for our daily bread

Give us this day our daily bread. Mt. 6:11.

Christ teaches us to pray: “Give us this day our daily bread.” He does not teach us to pray for riches and all kinds of luxuries, but rather only for daily bread.

A human being of course requires not only food. That’s why Luther in the explanation of the Fourth Petition in his Small Catechism introduces the question: “What then is meant by daily bread?” He answers: “Everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, fields, cattle, money, goods, a pious spouse, pious children, pious servants, pious and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors and the like.”

This obviously is a long list. But if we think back about each individual thing and person in the list, we can then see how necessary they all are – if we want to honorably earn our daily bread and thankfully receive it. Therefore we here pray for everything that pertains to our bodily nurture and need, and thus receive everything that God has provided for us with thanksgiving. We do this not only today, but also every day.

Dear God, for Jesus’ sake provide me with everything that pertains to bodily nourishment and needs. Amen.

Christians should pray in faith

Everything that you ask for in prayer, if you believe you shall receive it. Mt. 21:22.

It is a wonderful promise that Christ here gives to His disciples. Their prayers shall be heard. Everything that they ask for in prayer, they shall receive. However, a very important stipulation is attached to it: "If you believe."

The faith about which Christ is here speaking is not a particular faith, nor as to what kind it is to be. Rather it is a faith that God specifically shall hear that particular prayer, and that the one praying shall receive that which he prayed for. That is an important stipulation. What if the person praying does not believe that God shall give him what he asked for? Then the prayer is an offense to God. Then the person praying at the same time says to God: "Dear God, give me a certain gift, but I don't believe that You will do it." If we do not believe that God shall hear our prayer and give us that for which we have prayed, then we should much rather let the prayer be put aside.

However, how glorious is the promise: "Everything that you ask in prayer, if you believe, you shall receive it." How faithfully should we not then bring our request before God's throne in prayer!

**Dear God, teach me to pray in faith, so that I may be certain of Your hearing it, for the sake of Your dear Son.
Amen.**

The joint prayer with fellow Christians

If two among you become united upon earth, it will be that they will ask for what they want, it shall come to pass for them... Mt. 18:19.

In the instruction of His disciples in pursuing prayer, Jesus says: “When you pray, go into your closet and lock the door shut and pray to your Father in secret; and your Father shall grant it to you publicly’ Mt. 6:6). That prayer is here totally and completely a private matter between the Christian and his God.

However, the Lord Christ also acknowledges a prayer where two Christians become united about what they want to pray for. When two persons are to become one in any matter, it is necessary that they discuss with each other the matter that lies upon their hearts, exchange their thoughts, until they have arrived at a common conclusion. Here it is dealing with something about which they wish to pray for. It must also be something that deeply concerns both of them. They have discussed the matter, have become united, and thus pray – not privately in a closet, but instead jointly. Such a prayer has the wonderful promise: “It shall come to pass for them.” O how zealously should not we Christians practice joint prayers with fellow Christians!

Dear God, grant me and to other Christians grace that we more diligently practice joint prayer. Amen.

Prayer for person who has fallen

I have prayed for you that your faith does not cease. Lk. 22:32.

Two sides in the character of Peter are brought to light in stark contrast with the Biblical portrayal of this disciple. One time he is a man of faith, who freely and openly confesses: "You are Christ, the Son of the living God." But amidst danger he cowardly denies the Lord three times: "I don't know the Man."

What does the Lord do with this waffling minded disciple? He does not simply cast him aside as a useless man. He assures him: "I have prayed for you that your faith not cease." This prayer of the Lord was wonderfully answered. Peter repented and became a pillar of the Christian church. Who has not similarly known people in the Christian church who at one time accomplished glowing and great things, and again at another time struggled and despaired?

How should a Christian conduct himself towards such a person? It would be easy to totally write him off and condemn him. However, we should much rather follow the example of the Lord, and pray for such a person that his faith not cease.

Dear God, have mercy upon Christians who fall into severe sins. Grant that their faith in Jesus does not cease. Amen.

The prayer for workers in God's harvest

Pray to the Lord of the harvest that He send workers into His harvest! Mt. 9:38.

The Lord stood in the evening at the end of a busy day of labor. He saw a huge crowd and spoke the memorable words: "Pray to the Lord of the harvest that He send workers into His harvest!" He saw the people not as a burdensome inconvenience, but rather as a precious harvest that should be gathered in for God.

What indeed would the Lord have said if He had looked at the massive crowd of people today? The number of people upon the world today has grown to more the five billion people [actually it's over six and a half billion as I translate this, October 12, 2007]. If the harvest was big at Jesus' time, it is far greater today. Who can begin to realize the size of such a harvest? Christ directs His disciples to the Lord of the harvest and to the prayer; "Pray to the Lord of the harvest that He send workers into His harvest. If this prayer was necessary at the time of Jesus' wanderings here upon earth, then it is even far more necessary today with the huge mass of people in the world.

We do of course train pastors in our institutions of higher learning, but our strongest efforts will not suffice. Let us pray to God that He send workers into the harvest.

Dear God, have mercy upon the billions who do not know You. Send the workers into your harvest. Amen.

Christ prays for transfiguration

You, Father, transfigure [glorify] Me at Your side with the brightness [glory] that I had with You before the world existed. John 17:5.

Jesus teaches His disciples to pray not only through specific instruction, but also by His own example.

Among all the prayers of the Lord that are recorded, the High Priestly prayer in John 17 well takes first place. At the beginning of the prayer the Lord prays for Himself: “You, Father, transfigure Me at Your side with the brightness that I had with You before the world existed.” At the time He was confronted with the greatest depth of His humiliation – prior to His crucifixion. He prays that the Father would transfigure – glorify – Him. That the Lord would at this precise moment pray for transfiguration is easy to understand. However, can we perhaps learn something from this for our own prayer? Can we also pray for transfiguration?

A state of humiliation like the Lord suffered we can never experience – also not the kind of transfiguration like the Lord prays for. Yet we can also pray for transfiguration, for after this troublesome life Christ shall “transfigure our bodies, so that they become like unto His own transfigured body” (Phil. 3:21).

Lord Jesus, also transfigure my sinful body. Amen.

Christ's prayer for His own

Holy Father, keep in Your Name those You have given Me. John 17:11.

Here Christ prays for His disciples that God would keep them in His Name. Does this prayer have a counterpart in today's life of the church?

Today we no longer have disciples like the Lord had. However every pastor of a Christian congregation has students and congregational members who He instructs with God's Word. A faithful pastor prays for these like Christ had prayed for His disciples: "Holy Father, keep in Your Name those You have given me." And finally, every father of a household and every mother of a household have children whom they seek to rear in Christian discipline and admonition. And that's why they pray for them: "Holy Father, keep in Your Name those You have given me." Such a prayer most certainly will not remain unheard.

May the Lord Christ therefore teach all that have souls entrusted to them to pray for them.

Holy Father, keep Your own here upon earth in the faith amidst all the dangers that threaten them. Amen.

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