

Prayer Vigil 2006



We are pleased that you have accepted the invitation to pray during these hours. It is our prayer that this time will be a blessing to you and that your daily prayer life will be enhanced by this experience.

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1-4, Matthew 6:9-13), Jesus responded with what we know as the Lord's Prayer. The fact that the disciples requested a model for praying shows us that we don't have to feel guilty when we don't understand prayer and need help with it. From their question we see that even the disciples, who were with Jesus every day, witnessing his life and seeing how he prayed, still needed help with praying.

Their question shows us the common human tendency to want to "do" the spiritual life correctly, to know the "right" way. Jesus responds to their deep hunger to know God and feel connected to God. But with the very first words of the prayer, he signals a basic truth: prayer and the spiritual life are not about rules but about relationship, always relationship.

This guide for understanding and praying based on the Lord's Prayer is divided into four sections for each petition as identified in Luther's Small Catechism:

The first section consists of the petition of the Lord's Prayer and its meaning as explained in Luther's Small Catechism.

The second section is a brief study on the petition and elaboration on what we are praying.

The third section (*italicized text*) is thoughts for meditation and prayer based on the petition just studied.

The fourth section (underlined text) is a hymn from Lutheran Worship that can be used as a guide for further prayer and meditation.

Our Father who art in heaven.

What does this mean?

"God would thereby [with this little introduction] tenderly urge us to believe that He is our true Father, and that we are His true children, so that we may ask Him confidently with all assurance, as dear children ask their dear father."

The opening words of Jesus' prayer, "Our Father who art in heaven," are very significant. They remind us that we have personal and direct access to God the Father because he is our Father. The Creator himself is available to us! We don't need an appointment. "Our people" do not have to contact "his people." We don't have to send an e-mail, make a phone call or schedule a time in our Palm Pilot. God the Father, the one who should be too busy for us, is not too busy for us at all. In fact, it is quite the opposite. In prayer, through the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us and acting as our intermediary, we have an audience with God himself.

Bible scholars agree that behind the Greek word Πάτερ (pater), "father", is the word `abba in Jesus' native Aramaic tongue. Rather than the formal word for "father," `abba is the family word, something like the affectionate "Dad" or "Daddy" that we use in English. (Mark 14:36; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). There is a formal word for "father," but the word used here stresses the intimate family relationship. Though the rabbis spoke of God as the Father of the people or the nation, Jesus teaches us to address God as our own personal Father, a new and wonderful revelation.

Another aspect to note in praying "Our Father" is that we have the same access to God, the Heavenly Father, as Jesus did. Because of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in us, we too are sons and daughters of the Creator God, possessing all the same privileges of Jesus himself. We aren't instructed to address God any differently than Jesus did. This not only implies that we have access to God, but that we have been given the authority of Jesus himself.

Jesus then teaches us to pray to our Father "who art in heaven," which adds perspective to our understanding of God. Though Solomon built a temple for God, he prayed, "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27) Yes, God is greater than his creation, but "the heavens" is a way to understand the greatness of God's dwelling. And when we reflect on God's greatness, it is easier to have faith to ask of him things that seem difficult to us.

Think about God as your father. Are you fearful of or reluctant to approach God? In what ways would you like to deepen your relationship with God? Pray for a relationship with God that makes you draw closer to Him.

Hymn 198 - Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty

The First Petition.

Hallowed be Thy name.

What does this mean?

"God's name is indeed holy in itself; but we pray in this petition that it may become holy among us also."

Next, we come to the three "thy" clauses in the Lord's prayer: "Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done." Notice that the verbs here are imperatives. The significance of this is that an imperative is a form of command.

The first petition is "hallowed be Thy name." The Greek word is ἁγιασθήτω (hagiasthaito), which means "to treat as holy, to reverence." "Hallowed" comes from the English word "holy." Why does Jesus include the concept of "hallowed" in this prayer? Because without it, our understanding of "Father" can be distorted.

Our understanding of "Father" could become sentimental to the point of presuming upon and taking advantage of the Father's graciousness towards us. "Hallowed" reminds us that the Father is holy, set apart from sin. That he can be both the Father of sinners and set apart from sin requires Jesus' atonement to reconcile. When we pray, though we pray with the privilege of intimacy to our "Abba, Daddy," we are never to imagine that we are buddies with God, or his equals. He is always our Father, and he is holy and exalted. Jesus teaches us to call God our Father, recognize his exalted place of dwelling, and to reverence him.

How is this done?

"When the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we as the children of God also lead holy lives in accordance with it. To this end help us, dear Father in heaven. But he that



teaches and lives otherwise than God's Word teaches profanes the name of God among us. From this preserve us, Heavenly Father."

If now you pray for this with your heart, you can be sure that it pleases God; for He will not hear anything more dear to Him than that His honor and praise is exalted above everything else, and His Word is taught in its purity and is esteemed precious and dear.

Meditate on what in our lives and words "hallows" the name of our Father? What desecrates and besmirches it? Pray that God's Word continues to be taught in its truth and purity and that God would reveal Himself to your family, friends, and colleagues.

Hymn 171 - Holy God, We Praise Your Name

The Second Petition.

Thy kingdom come.

What does this mean?

"The kingdom of God comes indeed without our prayer, of itself; but we pray in this petition that it may come unto us also."

The idea of the Kingdom of God is complex. It goes far back into the Old Testament, at least to the book of Exodus, where God reveals himself as Israel's King. He makes a covenant with them in the form of an ancient suzerain-vassal treaty, a treaty made between a great king and a subservient people (Exodus 19:3-6). The tabernacle in the wilderness is the throne room of a desert monarch. He leads them by day and night. Having no king but Yahweh is one of the unique marks of the Israelites, to the extent that their clamoring for a king under Samuel's judgeship is considered a sin (1 Samuel 8).

John proclaims, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 3:2), and Jesus takes up the same message (Matthew 4:17). He sends out his disciples with the authority to do miracles and proclaim to villages, "The kingdom of God is near you" (Luke 10:9, 11). The kingdom of God comes when Jesus proclaims God's reign, and demonstrates that reign by preaching good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, sight for the blind, release for the oppressed, and the Jubilee Day of the Lord (Luke 4:18-19). The kingdom is here in Jesus and his disciples - and in you and me - but it will come fully and completely when Jesus returns to earth to reign as King and Lord of all (Revelation 11:15).

Jesus tells us to pray that the Kingdom of God come soon. As one of the last phrases of the Book of Revelation says, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20). The Kingdom will only be present fully when Christ returns, when "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 11:15).

How is this done?

"When our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead a godly life here in time and yonder in eternity."

Likewise, when we pray "Thy kingdom come," we are praying that the reality that God is present and active be made clear to the entire world. We demand of God that he be as active and present here and now as he is and will be in heaven. Praying for the kingdom is acknowledging that God is real and at work in the here and now.

Meditate on how God is manifesting the power and glory of his kingdom in us, and throughout our world. How is Christ demonstrating His reign over all? How can you help to fulfill the Great Commission and thereby hasten the return of Jesus Christ to this earth? Pray that God allow you to help in the spread of the Good News.

Hymn 149 - A Hymn Of Glory Let Us Sing

The Third Petition.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

What does this mean?

"The good and gracious will of God is done indeed without our prayer; but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also."



This petition is also a condition for prayer, that all our prayers conform first to God's will. How can we pray the kind of prayer that Jesus wants of us, and still ask for our petty desires which are so clearly contrary to God's revealed will in the Bible? Part of that teaching, is to determine God's will and pray along those lines. Prayer for disciples of Christ is not to be selfish prayer, but prayer in tune with and guided by God's will.

How is this done?

"When God breaks and hinders every evil counsel and will which would not let us hallow the name of God nor let His kingdom come, such as the will of the devil, the world, and our flesh; but strengthens and keeps us steadfast in His Word and in faith unto our end. This is His gracious and good will."

The last imperative is to pray that God's will be done. We are to exhort God to bring about the completion of his plan to restore our relationship with him, so that once again we will live in his presence, free from pain and suffering. God's will is to be in relationship with us, to be present as our good, faithful and loving Father.

The first three petitions (imperative clauses) point us in exactly the same direction: to what God is already doing. It's important to note that Jesus' example of prayer doesn't start with our needs; it starts with what God is already doing and longs to do. Jesus is concerned with our needs. However, we must not start with ourselves, but with God. And we begin by getting on the same page with God, by praying that heaven will break through and be present and visible on earth. That's what Jesus means when he adds that phrase "on earth as it is in heaven." God's desire and plan has heaven breaking through and being seen on earth.

Why are we asking for the Father's will to be done here on earth? How should this prayer affect our daily living? Pray that God enable you to live your life in accord with His will and teach us to pray according to His will.

Hymn 381 - Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus



The Fourth Petition.

Give us this day our daily bread.

What does this mean?

"God gives daily bread, even without our prayer, to all wicked men; but we pray in this petition that He would lead us to know it, and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving."



What is meant by daily bread?

"Everything that belongs to the support and wants of the body, such as meat, drink, clothing, shoes, house, homestead, field, cattle, money, goods, a pious spouse, pious children, pious servants, pious and faithful magistrates, good government, good weather, peace, health, discipline, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like."

The fourth petition in this prayer is for our own needs and comes after we have recognized God as our Creator, honored His Name, prayed for His Kingdom to come, and asked that His will be done on earth as in heaven. Now we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." This is a curious phrase, because in one short sentence it includes two words that are specific to the current day.

The word translated "This day" is Greek *ἡμέραν* (hemeron), a fairly common word that means "today". But also in the sentence is an extremely rare word, which is usually translated "daily," the word *ἐπιούσιον* (epiousion). This is a prayer for the immediate and not distant future and is reminiscent of Exodus 16:15-20 where the Israelites were told to gather only enough manna for today.

So, the prayer means something like, "Give us today everything that we need for today," and fits very well with Jesus' teaching later in Matthew 6:34, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own".

The implication here is that we are to come to God with our daily needs. When we say "Give us," that doesn't mean we don't expect to work for our living, but that we recognize God as our Provider. So often we have a regular salary that comes like clockwork, month after month, and we take our livelihood for granted. Only when we are laid off or touched by

serious illness do we begin to ask daily for his provision. Jesus teaches us to learn to become dependent upon our Father, and to bring to him our daily needs.

Sometimes you hear people saying that we should pray for others' needs, but not for our own, that God will provide without us even asking. Though that teaching sounds pious and faith-filled, it goes directly counter to Jesus' own teaching. We are to ask God for our daily needs. He is interested in our jobs. He cares about your school. He is concerned about the health of your business. He cares about your marriage, your children, and your relationships. Our church matters to him.

Why do we often avoid asking for help? Why do we seek to be independent of God? Why should we ask God to "give" us daily bread so long as we can earn a living for ourselves? Give God thanks for His continual provision, care and protection.

Hymn 416 - The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want

The Fifth Petition.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

What does this mean?

"We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look upon our sins, nor deny such petitions on account of them; for we are worthy of none of the things for which we pray, neither have we deserved them; but that He would grant them all to us by grace; for we daily sin much, and indeed deserve nothing but punishment. So will we verily, on our part, also heartily forgive and also readily do good to those who sin against us."



This petition of the Lord's Prayer is a demanding one. Not only do we ask God's forgiveness for our daily offenses, but we link God's forgiveness of us with our forgiveness of others. Forgiving others is not always easy to do. We need God's help to do it. But it must be done or we ourselves cannot receive God's mercy. Not only is Jesus showing us our need to pray daily for forgiveness, He is also making a point in this prayer, a point which he explains in more detail just after the prayer. "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly

Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, your Father will not forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:14-15) How could it be plainer? We must forgive, if we are to be considered sons of the Father. Otherwise he will not forgive us.

True forgiveness does not minimize the sin or the hurt, nor excuse the sinner. True forgiveness chooses not to hold the sin against the sinner any longer. True forgiveness is pardon.

Forgiveness is at the heart of Christianity and is essential to this prayer, because it correctly assesses our situation. Forgiveness is always preceded by sin. The Lord's Prayer reminds us of our need for forgiveness, and gives us the opportunity to go before our good and gracious Heavenly Father and acknowledge his grace and forgiveness.

The Greek word ἄφεσις (aphes) translated as forgiveness also means to cancel, remit payment, leave behind, forget, dismiss and to let go. It helps us understand what God has done for us and what we are called to do for those whom we must forgive. God does not hold onto the sin that is part of our nature. He has let it go, without any further consideration. In the same way we are told to pray that we might be able to "let go" of the sins of those who have sinned or trespassed against us.

For just as we daily sin against God, and yet He forgives everything through grace, so we, too, must continually forgive our neighbor who does us injury, violence, and wrong, shows malice toward us, etc. If, therefore, you do not forgive, then do not think that God forgives you; but if you forgive, you have this consolation and assurance, that you are forgiven in heaven, not on account of your forgiving, for God forgives freely and without condition, out of pure grace, because He has so promised, as the Gospel teaches, but in order that He may set this up for our confirmation and assurance for a sign alongside of the promise which accords with this prayer, Luke 6, 37: Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.

Why should we continually ask forgiveness? How can unforgiveness on our part block God's blessing? How can unforgiveness block God's forgiveness? Pray that God give you the grace to forgive those who have wronged you.

Hymn 285 - Chief of Sinners Though I Be

The Sixth Petition.

And lead us not into temptation.

What does this mean?

"God, indeed, tempts no one; but we pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us, nor seduce us into misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice; and though we be assailed by them, that still we may finally overcome and gain the victory."

Life is not easy. It is a daily battle. Trials like laziness, deceit, sickness and failure can crush our spirits. False values and easy promises can entice us and even destroy our souls. Temptation is of three kinds: of the flesh, the world, and the devil. For we dwell in the flesh, and the old Adam is still alive in us and he incites us daily to do wrong. Then comes the world, which offends us with words and deeds, and drives us to impatience and anger. Lastly the devil, who lies, deceives, worries and harasses us on all sides, but whose main target is the conscience and spiritual matters. And so we ask God to keep us from failing when we are tested, to help us to know the right thing to do, to deliver us from the evil which awaits us in life.

"When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed." (James 1:13-14) But God does test us. He allows circumstances that stretch and try us to make us pliable enough that he can remold us into his own image. "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance." (James 1:2-3)

Sometimes we flirt with temptation. We don't exactly seek temptation, but we are attracted to sinful things and so we sort of wink at them. Our resistance is low; we are being "dragged away and enticed" by our "own evil desire," as James puts it. This prayer, "and lead us not into temptation," helps teach us how important it is for us to stop flirting with sin but to actively flee and resist it.

This part of the Lord's Prayer reminds us to call upon the Father for strength when we are tempted. We are not to fight a secret war against sin; the Father wants to be our continual partner. He knows your weakness, and mine. He wants to free us and make us whole. What a wonderful Father! What wonderful grace!

"Therefore we must be armed and daily expect to be incessantly attacked, in order that no one may go on in security and heedlessly, as though the devil were far from us, but at all times expect and parry his blows. For though I am now chaste, patient, kind, and in firm faith, the devil will this very hour send such an arrow into my heart that I can scarcely stand. For he is an enemy that never desists nor becomes tired, so that when one temptation ceases, there always arise others and fresh ones."

If God does not lead us into temptation, why does He allow us to be tested? Do we face temptation alone? What struggles (refinements) are you going through? Pray for strength to resist temptation and for God's guidance to live a life that is pleasing to Him.

Hymn 191 - For All the Saints

The Seventh Petition.

But deliver us from evil.

What does this mean?

"We pray in this petition, as in a summary, that our Father in heaven would deliver us from all manner of evil, of body and soul, property and honor, and at last, when our last hour shall come, grant us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this vale of tears to Himself into heaven."

In the Greek text this petition reads: Deliver or preserve us from **the** Evil One - τοῦ πονηροῦ (tou ponairou), or **the** Malicious One; and it looks as if He were speaking of the devil, as though He would comprehend everything in one, so that the entire substance of all our prayer is directed against our chief enemy. For it is the devil who hinders us in every way and here we pray for: the name or honor of God, God's kingdom and will, our daily bread, a cheerful good conscience, etc.

This seventh petition is a prayer for deliverance or rescue from the evil one. It is recognition of the spiritual nature of our warfare against sin. There is not just our own temptation, there is a tempter – the Devil himself. In our own selves, we are no match for him. So we call out to God for rescue, for deliverance, for salvation from our enemy.

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Therefore we sum it all up and say: Dear Father, help us be rid of all these calamities. But there is nevertheless also included whatever evil may happen to us under the devil's kingdom: poverty, shame, death, and, in short, all the agonizing misery and heartache of which there is such an unnumbered multitude on the earth. For since the devil is not only a liar, but also a murderer, he constantly seeks our life, and wreaks his anger whenever he can afflict our bodies with misfortune and harm. Hence it comes that he often drives people to insanity, drowns some, and incites many to commit suicide, and to many other terrible calamities. Therefore there is nothing for us to do upon earth but to pray against this arch-enemy without ceasing. For unless God preserved us, we would not be safe from him even for an hour.

Hence we see again how God wishes us to pray to Him also for all the things which affect our bodily interests, so that we seek and expect help nowhere else except in Him. But this matter He has put last; for if we are to be preserved and delivered from all evil, the name of God must first be hallowed in us, His kingdom must be with us, and His will be done. After that He will finally preserve us from sin and shame, and, besides, from everything that may hurt or injure us."

Why is evil all around us in this world? Why can we not fight the Devil on our own? How does God protect us from Satan and his evil cohorts? Pray that God keep us safe from all evil and securely in His love as we struggle against Satan in this life.

Hymn 298 A Mighty Fortress is Our God

The Conclusion

For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever.

The Lord's Prayer ends with a crescendo of praise to the Lord God Almighty. After praying and acknowledging our need for God and his faithfulness to us, the only possible response is to give him glory, honor and praise: "For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen."

The kingdom is the Kingdom of God ; the power means the creative power of God (Isaiah 40.26; Psalm 104; Romans 1.20), which is spoken of in the context of the expected coming of the new aeon and the resurrection of man (Mark 13:26, 1 Corinthians 6:14; 15:43) and above all in the setting of the accomplished resurrection of Jesus (Romans 1:4; 1 Corinthians

1:24). The glory is not fame in the sense of popularity which passes so quickly. God already has his glory "in heaven," but the alienated world as a whole does not participate in it. Only in the confession of the faithful does it break into this world.

When the disciple praises God in this way, it is an expression of his confidence that God is able to fulfil his request, even though it may not be in the way we desired. God's power creates a new space while we still could see nothing other than death, destruction, and the end of life. We pray "Thy kingdom come" with confidence because we also confess "Thine is the kingdom," which means, God is able to establish His kingdom. The great power of faith consists of the fact that one becomes involved in something which holds the future, which God already has in his hands now.

What is meant by the word Amen.

Amen.

What does this mean?

"That I should be certain that these petitions are acceptable to our Father in heaven and heard; for He Himself has commanded us so to pray, and has promised that He will hear us. Amen, Amen; that is, Yea, yea, it shall be so."

"As James 1:6 says: "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. Behold, such importance God attaches to the fact that we are sure we do not pray in vain, and that we do not in any way despise our prayer."

Pray that God the Father, help us to pray the way Jesus taught us to pray. I confess that my way of praying is often self-centered and self-serving. Teach me to pray. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Hymn 443 - Now Thank We All Our God

My prayer for you is that you may also have that same burning desire that Paul had, to walk with your Lord in prayer every minute, praying constantly, as he admonishes us in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, "Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

Remember this, as you and your family grow in your walk with God through the understanding of The Lord's Prayer.