



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

**Sermon for Pentecost 8**  
July 23, 2023

## True Spirit Led Prayer

### Romans 8:18–27

*<sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

*<sup>26</sup> Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. <sup>27</sup> And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*

It was not by accident that Luther made the Lord's Prayer the third Chief Part of his *Small Catechism*. This was a departure from the traditional order of the Church's *Catechism*, which placed it before the Ten Commandments. For Luther, the very order in which the Chief Parts of the Faith were learned and memorized was vitally important.

In Luther's *Catechism*, the Ten Commandments come first because of their primary function, namely, to uncover our sin, to crush our sinful pride, and to show us our desperate need of a Savior. Then comes the Apostles' Creed, in which we're taught to confess the grace and mercy of God in Christ, who has forgiven our sin and raised us up with Himself to life and salvation.

Only then, on the basis of what He has done for us, are we invited to pray the Lord's Prayer. And this dear prayer, received from the Lord Himself, acknowledges all that we've learned from the Commandments and the Creed: our sinfulness . . . and our forgiveness in Christ.

The Lord's Prayer (along with the Apostles' Creed) has a special relationship to Baptism. The catechumens in the early church would receive and learn these two Chief Parts during Lent; then, at their Baptism – which would occur during the Easter Vigil – they would confess the Creed as they were immersed in the water, and afterwards (on the basis of their Baptism) they would pray the Lord's Prayer for the first time . . . together with the Church.



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So it is for you and me: It's only by our Baptism into Christ that we, too, are given the blessed privilege of approaching the Lord God Almighty as our Father . . . just as dear children ask their dear fathers here on earth (but thankfully, with even more confidence than we have in our human fathers).

It's important to realize, first of all, that the Lord's Prayer – like all Christian prayer – is never really “private” prayer; there's no such thing as a “private Christian” or “private Christianity.” Even when we “take it to the Lord in prayer” in the solitude of our own homes, we do so as members of the Body of Christ, as members of His Church of all times and places. So, it's always *our* Father that we pray to, and never simply *my* Father.

So, for example, the special importance of the Fifth Petition (forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us), which Jesus reiterates in His teaching of the Lord's Prayer. Because we do pray in communion with the entire Church — in the unity of Christ Jesus — our relationship with others (especially our fellow Christians) is part of our prayer. And, as Christians, that relationship is defined by forgiveness.

We come to the Lord in prayer with repentance and a humble recognition of our own sins; we know that of ourselves we're unworthy to stand in His presence, and that we do so only by His tender grace and mercy toward us. Each and every prayer that we bring to Him presupposes and is dependent on His forgiveness. As Luther puts it in the *Small Catechism*: “We are worthy of none of those things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them; but He must grant them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but punishment.”

And in this recognition of our sin, in our reliance on the mercy and free forgiveness of our gracious Lord, we for our part must “heartily forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.” Not because we “feel like it;” and not because they deserve it (forgiveness can't be “earned” in any case). But because the forgiveness we give is the forgiveness we receive; and if we refuse and reject forgiveness toward others, then we've also refused and rejected the forgiveness we need for ourselves.

Now, the Lord's Prayer — we should also realize — includes (along with forgiveness) everything we need for body and soul; nothing is excluded. There's no situation or circumstance for which the Lord's Prayer is not ideally suited; nothing we might face which is not addressed in these seven Petitions.

Whenever we find ourselves at a loss for words (and Saint Paul tells us that we don't even know how to pray as we should), we find our recourse and take refuge in this Prayer taught by Christ Himself. And even though our hearts and minds are not as pious and focused as they should be, we can know for certain that our lips are guided here by the Words of God Himself; and that the Holy Spirit is praying right along with us . . . and so also for us . . . in our sinful weakness.

When we pray for ourselves, and intercede for others — for our family and friends, for the Church, for those who are sick, etc. — then again the Lord's Prayer is most appropriate; it's a prayer “for all seasons,” you could say.



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So, we should never feel that we don't have anything to say, or worry that we aren't being "creative" or "clever" enough. "When you pray," Jesus says, "do so in this manner": "Our Father, Who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name. . . ."

The Lutheran Church has always included the Lord's Prayer in every single one of her liturgies. And Dr. Luther recommends in his *Small Catechism* that we include the Lord's Prayer in our daily prayers . . . in the morning when we rise, in the evening when we go to bed, and both before and after every meal.

In short, as the children of God, we do as Saint Paul writes, crying out, "Abba! Father!" to our Father in heaven. "Abba," as some of you might know, is – to this very day – the Middle-Eastern equivalent to our English word "Daddy." So, following Luther's advice (praying the Lord's Prayer at least eight times a day), we might properly think of ourselves as little children learning to speak to our Father, our Daddy, over and over throughout the day, with the grateful affection of children for the very dear Father who loves and cares for them.

It's also important to realize that everything we pray for in the Lord's Prayer is already granted us freely and by grace alone in Christ. This includes, as I said earlier, all that we need for our bodies and souls.

Beloved, I think you understand that our prayer is not a button we push or a cord we pull to order gifts and services from our Lord, as though He were our servant instead of our dear Father in heaven; as though He were not already (even without our prayer) daily and richly providing us with all good things . . . solely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in us. But we pray that He would grant us grace to see His Fatherly hand in all things, and to cling by faith to Him alone, trusting not in ourselves, nor in the gifts we receive, but in Christ and His mercy.

Ultimately, we pray the Lord's Prayer — and we do so with confident faith in Christ — because He Himself has commanded us to pray in this way and has promised to hear us.

We come to Him in prayer in much the same way that we go to Church and receive the Holy Sacrament: not because we're "in the mood"; not because we thereby do some great "favor" for God; and certainly not because we're somehow worthy in and of ourselves to stand before Him. But simply because He's commanded us to do so . . . because He's promised to be with us and to bless us . . . and because we need His gracious mercy and forgiveness every day of our lives.

Thanks be to God, we have His mercy and forgiveness without measure in His Son: our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Because of this, we ascribe all honor, glory, and praise to Him alone now and forever. Amen