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## The Lord's Prayer, the Pastor's Prayer

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## **The Lord's Prayer, the Pastor's Prayer**

### **I. Introduction**

Every prayer acceptable to God is a miracle wrought by Him and returning to Him. It may be illustrated by the letter V. Among these innumerable miracles the Lord's Prayer, in its content, sequence, and beauty, is unsurpassed. It is the summary of every God-pleasing prayer ever recorded in heaven or on earth. Every other prayer prompted by the Spirit is the Lord's Prayer in part, cast into a different form. Any opinion to the contrary is an evidence that the content of the Lord's Prayer has not been understood, nor its scope measured, nor its depth sounded. It would be an interesting task, and not a difficult one, to catalog every prayer ever sighed and said and recorded as heard and answered under the head of the respective petition of the model prayer. We find the prayer of Dysmas comprehended in the Seventh Petition, the prayer of the centurion in the Fourth Petition, and David's 51st Psalm can be condensed into the Lord's Prayer. Where would we place Jonah's prayer? and the Publican's? In the seven petitions we are urged to ask not merely for something, or for just a little, or for more, or for much, but for everything. We cannot pray for more than everything. Why not simply abbreviate the Lord's Prayer into the deep and compendious sigh: Father, give us everything? The Father understands, but He wants us to realize what we ask for and what He is giving.

It is true that the Lord's Prayer has a glory all its own. However, we must not overlook other model prayers designed and written for our benefit, such as that of Abraham (Gen. 18), of Jeremiah (Jer. 15:15 f.), of Stephen (Acts 7:59, 60). We must not ascribe to the Lord's Prayer a special glory because of the fact that Jesus composed and taught it. Who taught the palsied man and his friends to breathe a silent prayer as acceptable to God as

the Fifth and the Fourth Petition? Who taught the Syrophoenician woman, and Job, and Asaph, and Paul? The Holy Spirit was their Teacher. Therefore their prayers are as important to us from the viewpoint of authorship as the Lord's Prayer. The same Author helps the pastor's infirmities (Rom. 8:26, 27), which, to his perplexity appear again and again. True, we have memorized the Lord's Prayer, and sometimes we pray it with greater devotion, importunate courage, urgent fervency, and we know that it covers our situation as well as that of every believing man, woman, and child the world over. Still we depend on the Holy Spirit to interpret for us according to our needs the respective petition by prompting the words already suggested by it.

We should use diligently the privilege granted us by Christ, and like Paul and his associates take our pastoral interests to the Lord in prayer. If we know the wide extent and the long reach of each petition, we may spend hours confidently communing with Him on our many personal and official needs. And if, in the serious exercise of *Seelsorge* observe pastoral intercession for every soul committed to our care, we shall realize the power and blessing of prayer not merely in its reflex influence, but by divine answers that appear as miraculous. Every sermon will be better than "quoted, statisticated, and anecdoted"; for every good sermon is an answer to the prayer of some parishioner and of the pastor. Every pastoral and missionary admonition will prove convincing and convicting. Every call to the sick will become profitable for patient and pastor. And while we, constrained by love and duty, though burdened, help other burdened ones bear; and though weeping, dry others' tears; and though fighting, aid others in their conflicts of faith, we have the promise of being heard and the promise of God's answer of grace and compassion. Therefore we pastors are blessed with a most glorious prospect for the new year. Rejoicing, we shall have occasion to rejoice with others; relieved, we shall share in the relief experienced by others; victorious, we shall triumph with others in their victory. Our spiritual and pastoral energy is never exhausted by prayer, but by glum silence, by neglect of prayer, which is really neglect of God's will. God will replenish our energy by His means of grace. Hence we can do all things by Him who strengthens us. And when we feel intimidated and overwhelmed by the magnitude of the tasks facing us this year and we ask: Who is sufficient for these things? we turn to God with those comprehensive petitions. We see our tasks already done, and as conquerors include in the doxology of the Lord's Prayer the shout of victory: "But thanks be unto God, who always leadeth us in triumph in Christ." 2 Cor. 2:14 (R. V.).

At the beginning of this new year we must retain the *oratio* where Luther has placed it in his enumeration of the three pastoral requisites, because we need the Lord's guidance and blessing on our *meditatio* and His help against the *tentatio*. "Who desires, as Paul demands, to be apt to teach, that is, able to expound the doctrine of God, let him apply diligence, that he be first taught of God." (Erasmus: *Ecclesiastes*, p. 20; quoted in *Homiletisches Magazin*, Vol. 31, p. 4.) We are familiar with Luther's experience, who seems to have been busier than we are: "*Fleissig gebetet ist ueber die Haelfte studiert.*" As a pastor and as a man of prayer Luther invites to prayer in most encouraging and fraternal terms, and many of his own prayers are scattered everywhere in his writings. Johann Rist wrote the shepherd's prayer still sung in our circles as *Das Konferenzlied* (*Kirchengesangbuch*, Mo. Syn., No. 466). It is a favorite hymn among the older pastors. However, if volumes of a collection of acceptable pastoral prayers from past and present generations were printed and accessible, they could never serve as substitutes, but only as supplementary adaptations and applications, as paraphrases and redundancies, of the model prayer. To gain continual opportunity for prayer and the ministry of the Word—which are the two pastoral obligations—the Apostles requested the appointment of deacons by the congregation. We have the Apostles and their associates for examples of praying pastors, and we have Jesus Himself as our High Priest and the Holy Spirit as our Prompter. We have the heart of the Father as the repository for our prayer. When we depart this world, God's memory files will show that He answered all our prayers. In eternity He will say: I have left no prayer unanswered.

We are familiar with the general division of the Lord's Prayer according to its form: the Introduction, the Petitions, the Conclusion. We Lutherans number seven petitions. Combining those into one which we term the last two, the Reformed churches number only six. This is a matter of form and not of norm, of practical convenience and not of doctrine. In the content of the prayer we find an abrupt division between the Third and the Fourth Petition, a sudden turn, emphasized by the personal pronouns. The difference lies in the nature of the blessings requested. We may say that the first three petitions stress the blessings to us by which God glorifies Himself—though these are also contained in the following petitions—and that the remaining petitions pertain to the blessings to us by which God glorifies us, though these are also comprehended in the first three. To base upon this observation a course of thought parallel with the Ten Commandments is unwarranted and mere play. True, there is a relation among all Scriptural doctrines and spiritual functions.

But the Ten Commandments are the Law, and the Lord's Prayer is a blessing under the Gospel. Yet since love to God and confidence in Him and desire for Him, as well as love to the brethren and to the neighbor, are expressed in and by the Lord's Prayer and since love is the fulfilling of the Law, therefore the pastor who is able to pray the Lord's Prayer perfectly, fulfills the Law perfectly by thought and word. And now let him fulfill it also by perfect and effective deed.

It is unbelievable that Jesus should have taught the Petitions at random, without an orderly trend of thought known to the divine mind. Only the old man objects to the fourth place for his bodily interests and sulks, while the new man wonders at the grace of Christ which allows us to request "all these things" before we ask for forgiveness and victory and home. But observe how the Lord teaches us in these petitions to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness; how He then adds the petition for "all these things," placing it last in the order of gifts; how now, all spiritual and temporal provisions supplied, we are to ask for deliverance from evil. What therefore may appear as a seeming contradiction in the same chapter (Matt. 6:11-13, 33) is found to agree: we ask first for provisions for soul and body, then for protection and safety for soul and body. There is no evidence that the copyists arbitrarily shifted the Fourth Petition to its present place. The form is correct, the content is correct, and whatever is Scriptural should be prayed.

Each petition may be designated also by its own characteristic. The first has been called the necessary petition, the second, the missionary, and consecutively: the most difficult, the easiest, the dangerous, the conquering, the homing petition. Each petition may be assigned to a season of the church year, for instance, the First to the Trinity season, the Second to Advent, the Third to Lent, the Fourth to Epiphany, the Fifth to the close of the church year, the Sixth and the Seventh to New Year or again to Lent. But let us not play with the sacred treasure. And let us not disregard the staid and true, though rigid, exegetical and homiletical principles for the sake of emotional and spongy mysticism and wishful allegorizing.

We sometimes preach a series of sermons on the Lord's Prayer. Our congregations may request of us that effort. The series will not overtax our strength, if we, by reason of constant personal use of this prayer, move in its content and if we approach each sermon study with the sigh: "Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law," (Ps. 119:18). All that remains, then, is the choice of homiletical treatment. Must each petition serve as an independent, nude text, since it seems to

introduce an independent topic? Must we, then, shift to the inferior topical sermon? Learn from Luther, and follow Luther, and cast these sermons into the frame of Luther's exposition of the Lord's Prayer. We have the added advantage that we can build on a foundation already existing, for our congregations are familiar with the meaning of the petitions from Luther's Small Catechism. They will be edified by the repetition of their accumulated knowledge and the more ready to assimilate additional knowledge. At the close of the series we shall be surprised to note that, after all, our sermons were not topical, but textual.

We find the Lord's Prayer recorded twice in the form in which the Savior has molded it: Matt. 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4. We do not purpose to enter here on textual criticism, but assign it to the pastor's private study. Textual criticism is helpful to the expositor, and the neglect of it is not an act of wisdom. A most practical aid and encouragement will be found in the CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, Vol. V, No. 8, in the article "The Chief Principles of New Testament Textual Criticism."

We compare the two records. Evidently both Evangelists record the same prayer. The general content is the same. The course of thought and the order of the petitions are the same. Luke's form is the shorter in all the readings that we have compared. A strange inconsistency of some expositors is the disagreement on the originality of the form (some contending for Matthew, others for Luke) and the general agreement that Jesus was not teaching a formula at all or an obligation of verbal repetition, but the *substantia*. It seems to us that we can readily settle the question of originality by referring to the historical fact that Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount long before the incident related by Luke and to the doctrine of independent divine inspiration, which means that Matthew and Luke wrote independently and did not copy each other's manuscript. The Lord actually repeated to the disciples the prayer He taught in the Sermon on the Mount. The substance is emphasized in that the same prayer is taught on two different occasions. The freedom of form and choice of words is granted by the brevity of the repetition. The objections that the Savior missed the opportunity, in the record of Luke, to teach another model prayer and that His instruction there is a vain and poor repetition, are met by the context and by the nature of this prayer. True, the Third Petition and the Seventh are wanting. However, we claim that these petitions are not omitted, for they are included in the substance. Jesus could not teach a prayer for any other blessing because the petitions comprise all blessings. Therefore the freedom can refer only to the choice of words, not to the things which we should desire most. In the weakness of their flesh and

the obstinacy of the heart the unstable may insist on abusing this freedom by willfully omitting, for instance, the Third Petition or the Sixth or the second half of the Fifth on the argument that Jesus, too, made omissions, either prudently for improvement or unconsciously by faulty memory or deliberately in view of our weaknesses. We say again that in His repetition Jesus omitted nothing else than words and whoever refuses to pray for everything desires nothing. Both forms lack nothing in completeness and perfectness. We prefer to ask, and we teach our congregations to pray, in the thoughts and words given by the harmony of both records, sometimes paraphrasing, sometimes emphasizing the one or the other petition, but never detracting from the substance of the whole prayer. Besides these two accounts there is no further reference in the Scriptures to the form, but ever and again to the content of this prayer.

On both occasions the Teacher speaks to the same students, namely, to the disciples, and not to the unbelievers (Matt. 5:1, 2; Luke 11:1, 2). The prayer belongs to the disciples of Jesus, not to the unbelievers. The latter want to steal this prayer and pearl from us, and we object to their use of it; for their prayer, even these petitions in their mouth, is vain repetition and blasphemy. Some want to steal the authorship from Jesus, whom they hate, and ascribe it, with nasty unscholarliness, to pagan liturgies and chants.

The first record of the Lord's Prayer is Matt. 6:9-13. We recognize the importance of the context and read verses 5-15. These are words of the Sermon on the Mount, and since this sermon is the exposition of the Law, the question clamors for an answer: Is the Lord's Prayer Law or Gospel? The Formula of Concord rightfully declares: "The true and proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel must with all diligence be inculcated and preserved, and whatever gives occasion for confusion *inter legem et evangelium*, that is, whereby the true doctrines, Law and Gospel, may be confounded and mingled into one doctrine, should be diligently prevented." (*Trigl.*, p. 961.) When we and our congregations pray the Lord's Prayer, are we moving under the Law or under the Gospel? We suggest that the pastor read the entire Art. V, F. C., *Trigl.*, pp. 951-961. We advance the following observations. The Sermon on the Mount was addressed to the disciples, who were justified by grace for Christ's sake through faith. They were no longer under the Law. The Sermon is designed for their growth in daily sanctification, and it stresses not the *Glaubensgerechtigkeit*, but the *Lebensgerechtigkeit*. Jesus does not introduce prayer as a means of grace or as a meritorious work. He elevates holiness of life by contrast with pharisaical ostentation and heathen ignorance, also with respect to prayer. Since this is

the will of God, even our sanctification, therefore Jesus teaches His disciples: "After this manner pray." These considerations cause us to conclude that the Christian prays as being under the Gospel and above the Law, already perfectly fulfilled by Christ. The impartation as well as the content of the Lord's Prayer is Gospel, the ascription "Our Father" also clinching the point at issue; the Christian's act of prayer is a work according to the Law motivated and directed by the Gospel. Incidentally we remark that we perform the act of prayer without first analyzing it in such detail. The occasion recorded in Matthew suggests the inference that this instruction is an act mainly of the prophetic office of Christ.

The second record of the Lord's Prayer is Luke 11:2-4. The context must be considered, and we read verses 1-13 of the chapter. The first instruction was given in Galilee after the second Passover; the second in the vicinity of Jerusalem, some six days before the fourth Passover. Hence far more time than a year elapsed between the two instructions.

Jesus was praying. He was praying in the presence of His disciples. They had seen Him pray on other occasions. Why should Jesus want to pray? Some think to have solved the mystery by confining the concept of prayer in the case of Christ to praise and thanksgiving, others, to intercession. Some spill much emotional slush on this most holy act of our Savior. The element of dependence, and therefore the necessity and need, must be admitted even under the proposition of the concept of praise and thanksgiving. The mystery is solved only by the doctrine of our Savior's person and work, chiefly by the doctrine of His priestly office. He prayed not only to be our Example, but because He is our Savior. As our Savior, being in need on our account, He prayed in His own behalf. Heb. 2:17, 18; 5:7, 8; Ps. 22; Luke 22: 41-44; Phil. 2:7, 8. These references are only a few from among many. As our Savior and High Priest He interceded for us. As our Savior and High Priest, Substitute, He perfectly fulfilled the Law for us. The Law demands that we offer to God perfect prayers in the perfect attitude and manner: a demand which neither those disciples nor we have ever satisfied. God demands of us as pastors perfect prayers and perfect intercessions for those committed to our care and perfect acknowledgments of all His blessings to our office. If the Lord should mark iniquity, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Him in Christ, the saving Man of Prayer. As Christ's praying is an act of His priestly office, of His active obedience, so His giving of the Lord's Prayer in particular at this incident is an act of the same office.

Also the pastor at times martyrs the Lord's Prayer. He does not always pray it to perfection. He awakes with a start, and



he repents. Then he realizes again that he needs the substitutionary blood and righteousness of the Great High Priest, Jesus, and the groaning of the Holy Spirit. In utter dependence he practices greater concentration. He learns, too, that his prayer implies also a pledge to God to accept with satisfaction and gratitude God's answer and to conform his life and work to that answer. The pastor will be careful not to sin against the will of God expressed in the Lord's Prayer.

The disciples waited silently and reverently. The desire to pray confidently and with filial devotion moved in their hearts. They may have exchanged whispers leading to the determination to appeal to the Master. Jesus paused in His prayer. Then came the request: "Master, teach us to pray as John also taught his disciples." It is evident that the spokesman was asking in behalf of all present. The request is a prayer. The prayerful pray effectively and successfully for instruction in effective and successful prayer. The paradox is similar to that expressed in the prayer: "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." They are not ignorant, for their simple request is uttered according to knowledge, though they plead ignorance. We pastors join the disciples in this prayer: "Teach us to pray." We place it under the three first petitions. After so many years with Christ, are these men, and we, still ignorant? The answer is Rom. 8:26. Had the disciples forgotten the first instruction, perhaps by reason of disuse? Our parishioners acclaim us men of prayer. We lead in prayer in public and in private. And we rejoice in prayer. "Master, teach us to pray."

The request is acceptable and granted. Jesus repeats to us the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer is an answer to prayer.

We Lutheran pastors have pledged adherence to our confessional writings. Luther's Preface to the Large Catechism (*Trigl.*, 566 f.) and his Introduction to the Lord's Prayer (*Trigl.*, 696) offer to the prayerful pastor rich meditations. Our confessional writings stress the doctrine that prayer is true service and true honor to God (*Trigl.*, 392:29), and they state under what conditions praying is an abomination to God (*Trigl.*, 296); for the praying of the Lord's Prayer is a matter of our sanctification, not of our justification, and it avails nothing *ex opere operato*.

We must warn our parishioners against the old sin of leaning more or less on the Lord's Prayer as a *carmen magicum*. We must warn them and one another against thoughtless praying. We must train ourselves and our congregations in the art of speaking the prayer slowly for time to think, and reverently and solemnly for the exercising of our faith, so that we do not time our prayer by the clock but by our own and our congregation's need and by the

measure of our gratitude. We must warn against the vain repetition of the Lord's Prayer and against the disdainful criticism offered by the vainglorious Pharisee against the brevity of the model prayer, which punctures and deflates his airy and breezy verbiage. We must warn against the complaint that the Lord's Prayer is too comprehensive for concentration on the desire to be expressed. We must warn against the errorists who hold that prayer is a means of grace by which God imparts to us His mercies. We must rather remind our congregations that prayer is our sacrifice and offering to God and our means of exercising power with God.

Power with God! In gratitude for grace and mercy received, in view of the world's needs and the Church's wants, in the conviction of our utter dependence on the Father, for the solution of our pastoral and personal problems, let us pray, let us pray more than we ever prayed before. It is not a new thought that the world is ruled by the Christian through his fervent prayer. Who, then, should be most powerful but the pastor? You pray the First Petition, and what happens? God's name is hallowed! Is not this wonderful? You pray the Second Petition, and what happens? God's kingdom comes! Is not this amazing? You pray the Third Petition, and what happens? God's will is done. Is not this glorious? Most certainly, your prayer influences the course of this world and the progress of your congregation and the affairs of your home. Our prayer is the solution to the mystery of history everywhere. Power with God!

G. H. SMUKAL

(To be continued)

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## I Believe in the Resurrection of the Body

The upper house of the Convocation of Canterbury, Church of England, has decided to delete the phrase "resurrection of the body" at cremation ceremonies. One bishop said that young people scientifically trained are "not so much indignant as amused at the phrase." Whenever they reach these words in the Apostles' Creed, they must experience a limp in the tongue.

A similar expression of doubt in regard to the resurrection of the body appeared last Easter within the American Lutheran Conference. It was issued by C. J. Soedergren, D.D., "author of a number of books on exegesis, former professor at Augustana Theological Seminary," in an article, "*Resurrectio Carnis*," in the *Augustana Quarterly*, April, 1944, pp. 111—126. (This article will be referred to here as S.) Soedergren speaks of the resurrection of the flesh as a "'doctrine' frightful in content and fateful in consequence," "the 'eschatology' of thousands to this very day" (S:112). "the materialistic doctrine espoused even now" (S:113). It is due