

Midweek Lenten Service

Wednesday, March 18, 2009

“A Prayer That Sums It All Up” (The Lord’s Prayer)

Suppose you were commanded by God and invited by God to pray for all the needs you have and all the gifts he has to give you. Think of that! All of your needs, all of His gifts. And you have to put it all into a prayer. How long would it take you to pray for all those things? How many hours, how many thousands of words?

Well, the answer is, about 30 seconds and 70 words. 30 seconds? 70 words? How can you possibly cover all of God’s gifts and our needs in that short of a time and with those few words? But our Lord Jesus seems to think it’s possible. In fact, he even gave us a prayer that does all of that. We call it the “**Lord’s Prayer**” or the “**Our Father.**” In this short prayer, which we can pray every day, we are invited by God to come to him and call upon him, asking for all of his gifts, seeking his help in all of our needs. The Lord’s Prayer is truly “**A Prayer That Sums It All Up.**”

This is how it is with these texts of the Catechism, isn’t it? Short summaries that cover vast and profound things. The Ten Commandments, covering all of God’s will for our lives and showing us all of our sins where we fail to do it--all covered in just Ten Commandments of 83 words. The Apostles’ Creed, a summary of the entire New Testament, telling us who the Triune God is and how He Creates, Redeems, and Sanctifies us--all of that in only 111 words. And, now, this comprehensive prayer, the Lord’s Prayer, 70 words. What a complete and to the point explanation of the Christian faith and life we have in these parts of the Catechism! Easily memorized, ready for our recall, right there for our use, morning, noon, and night--anytime, anywhere, every day.

Tonight our focus is on this summary prayer, the Lord’s Prayer. It covers all of our needs and all of God’s gifts in one short prayer. And we are taught and invited by Christ to pray this prayer and come to our dear Father who promises to hear us. This is a prayer we can be sure of, that we can put a hearty “**Amen**” on, for Christ himself is the one who has given it to us. Think of what a treasure we have here in this prayer! Our only problem is that we do not pray it often enough, with thought and with faith.

The Lord’s Prayer is both a prayer that works in itself-- and it also serves as a model and a springboard for further praying. It works as a pattern for prayer. Look how each line can lead to more praying.

“Our Father, who art in heaven”: Know first who this God is who are you coming to in prayer, that he is your dear Father who loves you and cares for you. Meditate on God’s character as you have learned to know him, and put that into words.

“Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Seek first God’s kingdom and glory and honor, the things that pertain to what God is doing in the world--make them your concern. For example, **“Thy kingdom come”** can lead us to pray petitions related to the spread of the gospel, that God’s kingdom of grace be extended in the world through the ministry of the church. You may name particular missionaries or ministers you have on your heart. That would be using the Lord’s Prayer as a pattern for further praying.

Likewise, when we come to the petitions about daily bread and the forgiveness of sins. *What are the particular needs of this body and life that you have or that your fellow Christians have?* Put them into words, and bring your supplications before your Father in heaven. *What are the sins you are aware of, that trouble you and for which you need forgiveness?* Confess them before your gracious God, pleading the blood of Christ your Savior. *Are there those who have sinned against you?* Pray for a heart of forgiveness, and ask God for help to restore your relationship.

Then we come to the attacks of the devil upon us: **“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”** God wants you to call on him in the day of trouble. When temptations fly about your head, call on God for help. When the evil one is throwing evil things your way--attacks of every sort, both physical and spiritual--pray in the name of the Mightier One, Jesus Christ, who has defeated the devil on the cross. Name the things for which you need help, and call on God for protection and deliverance. He promises to hear you and to help you.

“Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.” And so we conclude our praying the way we began, by praising and glorifying God. **“For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever.”** Sing a hymn as part of your daily prayers. I highly recommend this. Praising God in song, rejoicing in the Lord, will not only lift your spirits, it will also stimulate and spur on your faith, as you dwell on the goodness of God. **“O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.”**

With such a prayer as the Lord’s Prayer, whether we pray it by itself or use it as a pattern for praying our own specific petitions--in any case, when we pray thus, knowing that we have a gracious and merciful God who hears us and promises to answer, then *what else can we say but “Amen”?* Yes, yes, it shall be so! For God has commanded us to pray, He has promised to hear us, He invites us to come to

Him as His dear children, and Jesus Himself teaches us to pray these very words in this very way! If that doesn't merit an **“Amen,”** I don't know what does!

Yes, if Jesus gives us this prayer and teaches us to pray in this way, we can be certain and confident in our praying. *For who is Jesus but the very Son of God, who came from heaven from the Father's side? Who is Jesus but the one who reveals the Father to us, through whom we know the Father's heart?* We come to God and call on him as **“our”** Father, because we are coming in company with Jesus, the one-and-only Son of the Father, in a unique sense. Through Christ, we have gained access to God and this grace in which we now stand. For Christ has opened the way to God through His blood shed for us on the cross. Our sins stood in the way and prevented our access to the Father, but Jesus has opened the new and living way through His body. Having won forgiveness for us by His death, Christ has risen and ascended into heaven and presents that shed blood as the perfect sacrifice for our sins, that intercedes for us, that gives us access to the throne of God, where we will find help and grace when we need it. The Lord's Prayer becomes possible because of the Lord's Blood shed on our behalf.

And so now through Christ, joined to him in Baptism, we are brothers of Jesus, and the Father becomes our Father, too. What a great and glorious privilege we have been gifted with to call on our Father in prayer!

What a great and glorious prayer we have to do it with! The Lord's Prayer, a prayer given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ himself, in which all of our needs and all of God's gifts are summed up for us in one brief prayer. You can pray it every day, two or three times a day, but this is a prayer that is ever new, every time we pray it--because our needs, always changing, will always fall under its comprehensiveness. God's gifts, which are greater than our needs--all of God's gifts, which he pours out on us day after day--all of those countless gifts are packed into this little prayer.

The Lord's Prayer, **“A Prayer That Sums It All Up.”** Only 70 words, but it will take us 70 years, 80, 90 years, to pray it--every day of our life, until the good and gracious Lord gives us a blessed end. Amen! It shall be so! Amen!