

“Our Daily Bread”
4th Petition of Lord's Prayer
Thanksgiving Eve
November 25, 2009
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Girard, Illinois

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

On this day set aside by our government for the giving of thanks, we will do so by considering and meditating on the 4th Petition of the Lord's Prayer. So if you would, please turn to the back of your bulletins and answer the questions that I will ask you from the catechism. *What is the 4th Petition of the Lord's Prayer?*

“Give us this day our daily bread.” What does this mean? God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.

Let's stop there for a moment. **“God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people.”** Think about what that means. It means that God's goodness is not dependent on your praying. The Scriptures say that He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and He sends His rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. The Lord is good. Period. If you stop praying, He's not going to stop being good. So don't think that your praying is what gets God to do things, as if we can manipulate Him to do what we want. The truth is that very often it seems to be the unfaithful and the unscrupulous who are doing better at acquiring daily bread than Christians! In fact most of Psalm 73 is a lament at how prosperous the wicked often are. And yet the Psalm also confesses trust in the ways of the Lord, who brings down the unrepentant to utter desolation and destruction in the end. So, we don't pray **“Give us this day our daily bread”** in order to make God do something He otherwise wouldn't.

But that raises the question, **“Why should we pray for daily bread at all, then?”** We do so because in praying this petition, we are drawn by God to remember that He is the One who gives us our daily bread and all things, and we learn in that way to give Him thanks and honor as our gracious God. God gives us this prayer not for His benefit but for ours, so that we might learn to look to Him for all our needs and trust in Him and cling to Him, lest we forget about Him and turn away from Him and begin trusting in ourselves, to our own destruction. *That's the real danger that we face as fallen sinners, isn't it?* To think we've gotten where we are in life by our own sweat and hard work and good choices and intelligence. Without God's blessing, none of those things would matter. This is what Moses warns us against in the OT reading, **“Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, lest you say in your heart, 'My power and might of my hand have gained me this wealth.'”** When we are unthankful, it is because we have forgotten that every good thing that we have in our life is an undeserved gift from our merciful heavenly Father, for which we should thank and praise, serve and obey Him.

One way you'll be able to tell that most people don't really get this point, even on Thanksgiving Day, is in the way they talk about giving thanks. If you listen carefully, you'll notice that while people

may talk about what they're thankful for, there's almost no talk about who they're thankful to. There's no mention of the one who receives our thanks, no mention of God or the Lord. Just as Christmas has in many ways become Christ-less in our culture, so also Thanksgiving has become God-less. Sometimes I think when people say they're thankful for something, they just mean they're glad they have it or they feel good about it. So be sure when you talk about what you're thankful for that you say, **"I'm thankful to God for this or that."** For ultimately it's not our giving of thanks, but who we're giving thanks to that matters.

Let's continue with the catechism: *What is meant by daily bread?*

Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.

As I've already been indicating, when we pray for daily bread, we are asking for more than just food. We are also praying for everything that is necessary for us to receive it and enjoy it. It's hard to enjoy your daily bread when you've got rude neighbors or a grouchy spouse or bad health or violence in the streets. And so when we give thanks for daily bread, our hearts and minds should think beyond the turkey and stuffing on the table, and consider also the farmer's field and the weather and the trucker who transports and the baker who bakes and the store which sells and the employment by which we earn our money to buy and civil order in society and so forth. All of this is in God's hands. All of this is what we need and ask for in this petition so that our bodily needs might be provided for.

And yet, we should never forget that this petition comes in 4th place in the Lord's Prayer, not 1st or 2nd or even 3rd. That is meant to teach us something, namely, that daily bread is not the most important thing. First comes God's name, God's kingdom, God's will; and only then comes the daily needs of this life. You see, the Lord preserves and protects life not simply because He created it, but especially in order to save it for eternity. The reason He feeds even the wicked and the unbeliever is so that the unbeliever might repent and believe. That is His will-not just to provide for you for a time, but to have you with Himself forever.

And so our receiving of daily bread is ultimately meant to draw us to the even more important receiving of the Bread of Life, our Savior Jesus Christ. Just as God provides food for both the good and the evil, so also our Lord Jesus died on the cross for all, for the morally upright and for the immoral, for the noble and the shameful, for those who believe in Him and for those who do not. The Lord is good, and His goodness is shown in His mercy toward people like us, that He took the punishment for all of our ingratitude and pride and sinful self-love, and by His suffering and death He forgave us and freed us from eternal judgment. This is the greatest blessing for which we give thanks today, that the Living Bread from Heaven has been given to us, Bread which we may eat of and never die. As Jesus said, **"Whoever eats of this bread will live forever. And the bread which I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."** It's no coincidence that we pray **"Give us this day our daily bread"** in the liturgy right before we receive Holy Communion. For that petition (and indeed every petition of the Lord's Prayer) is answered most perfectly in the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood, given and shed for our forgiveness.

And so our Lord exhorts His disciples and us in today's Gospel: Don't rejoice simply in the fact that the spirits are subject to you, that you have certain spiritual or material gifts. Don't simply give thanks to God for your house or car or job or family. Rather, rejoice especially in this, that He has written your names in heaven by the blood of Christ. You who are in Christ are in the Book of Life. You are saved and redeemed and reconciled to God. You are His baptized chosen ones. And if you have that, you have it all-even if you're struggling to pay the bills, even if your health is failing. In Jesus you have the unimaginable riches of heaven. In Him you have the perfect health of His resurrection life and His victory over the

grave. So it is written, **“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?”** That's how St. Paul could say in today's Epistle, **“I have learned the secret of being content in any and every circumstance, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”**

God grant that Paul's faithful attitude may also be our own, that our prayers and petitions may be filled with thanksgiving to God for all of His fatherly love toward us. **“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, and His mercy endures forever.”** Amen.