

7th Week of Pentecost Sermon
July 23/24, 2022

The hiddenness of prayer is an inner working of the Holy Spirit in the one who lives by faith. It seems as though some think of this as a commanding, or at least use prayer as a constant petition to God, seeking specific outcomes. If one is in hospital and one prays, there is the expectation that there ought to be healing. This is not prayer, not even a request, but it is almost as if God were a puppet on a string. If God were invented, this would be nothing less than a show. If God is the Creator of the universe, then who am I to come to the Lord and make demands? We do well to sit at the Master's feet as He instructs us. He instructs how to pray. It is a privilege and not a duty. It is something done through our mediator and High Priest, Jesus.

The petitions of the Lord's prayer in Luke are fewer than in Matthew, but let us take a look at the familiarity between the version we often speak and the petitions recorded here so that we may understand better what Jesus is teaching us. Rather than a catechism lesson, looking at these things point by point, let us sit back and see things from their overarching view. Let us hear Jesus teaching us.

The first thing to notice here is that it begins with "our Father." The *our* here is plural. We are not being taught to think of the Father as a best buddy, or some other character who condescends to our presence. Sometimes we are too cavalier, too familiar, when we are in the presence of pure love, pure holiness. If we think about these things, we begin to realize that only by the grace granted to the bride of Christ, the church, and only through the merit of Christ are we able to gain access the throne. There is an order of things and we are to honor that order. In a day and age where there is so much dishonor, we are taught to honor the Lord God our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

God the Father is holy. He is to be hallowed, revered, worshiped, and glorified. In fact, when we gather on Sunday, we are to gather together with the understanding that we are coming into His holy presence. This is to be a house of prayer. Do we know how to rightly pray? Each worship service is an opportunity to practice what will be the reality in eternity. This is, if you will, the training ground to prepare us for what is to come. Pray knowing that God's kingdom is coming. Know that in Christ, His kingdom is already here. In the in between, the now and then, the Lord is providing for our every need. Do we really need more stuff? What is it that we really need? The Lord knows. We come to Him and ask for Him to provide what is needed. We also pray for the truth of what He has commanded so that it may be lived out in our daily lives. We are to love our neighbors. How do we do this? Knowing they are sinners, just as we are, we need to learn to forgive as we have been forgiven. None of the holier-than-thou attitude which is so rampant in our culture. We are to learn what it means to forgive as we have been forgiven.

The last petition is the one we often ignore. The Lord so loves us that He will do exactly what He said He would do. It is said that one does not need to be educated to become a Christian because Christianity itself is an education. If we recognize that Jesus meant business, that is, the reality of the need for our salvation, and I mean so much so that He willingly gave up His life to accomplish this business, we do well to realize that He is not going to stop at some imaginary halfway point. He intends to make of us people like Himself, holy, pure, and ready to dwell forever in the Father's presence. If we understand this, then we know there are only two possibilities for those who are on the path of salvation. We can do it the easy way – that is willingly cooperating in the Holy Spirit – or the hard way – the hard way is being allowed to go down the path of temptation.

It is kind of like the reality every historian learns early on. It is true that history does not repeat itself, but humans do have a way of not learning from history. We do not learn the lesson. The Lord loves us enough that if need be, He will let us go through the difficult places in order that we may learn that His way is not only the right way, but the only way of righteousness. If you travel down the path of temptation it is what is needed to bring about understanding that the way of the world is the way of destruction. If you are unwilling to learn the lessons the Lord freely gives, then perhaps, what is what is needed is to take your own path and discover on your own the way which leads to destruction. Some children will only learn after they have touched the hot stove. Some children of God learn only after experiencing the heat of sin. God loves us enough to allow whatever needs to happen to happen in order that we might have the opportunity for genuine, real, and complete salvation.

There is more here that we need to learn. There is the understanding that in this world we need to learn how to be persistent. Too often, we readily and easily capitulate to the pressures of society. More often, we are not aware of the incremental ways in which we are led astray. If you look around you and ever wonder, "How did we get here?," it means you were not paying attention to the signs that were present along the way. To be sure, we've all done that. This is why Scripture is so adamant about our being on the alert and being prepared. If we will not protect the territory around us, how is it that we would expect anything other than the incursion of those things which change everything? Has this not happened? The world has not only become hostile to God, but has little tolerance for real faith. We need to take care and join with Jesus as He teaches us how to live in a world where people of faith are the minority.

The world may have become blind to the truth, but that does not mean we need to refuse to see. Believing in the materialist ideal that all around us is what we will make of it and no more, there is no understanding of the Lord God who made us. Seen as just antiquated religious people, people of faith are often treated as the crazy ones. What is goofy about this is that although there are so many that project upon us their idea of what religion is, with their own projection, they show how ignorant they are. As I speak this, it is with great lament, for I am unable to fathom how people can see things this way.

So as Saint Paul said, I repeat, we are not just to have the outward appearance of religion, but be circumcised of heart, that is, the cutting away of the sin which would cause us to not come into the holy presence of a holy God. We are to daily pray – and pray as the Lord teaches us to pray – so that we may follow as He leads as our Savior leads us in the way of salvation. This life is filled with pitfalls and unless the Lord is the one leading us, we shall not be able to make the journey.

Knowing that it is not the outer person as much as the inner person that is at the core of our character, let us hold fast to the faith we have received. You know this, for there are times when who you see in the mirror is not the same person you know yourself to be in the mind. Time in this world is fleeting, but what the Lord is offering is forever. Come then and learn how to pray. Practice what the Lord teaches and watch as day by day He transforms you from one who is distant and distracted to one who is aware of His presence and purpose. The Lord is unfolding before our very eyes the things He has promised.

Be a people of prayer just as our Lord has taught us to pray. Learn to honor the Lord with your whole being and be led now and always into the goodness of our Lord through His grace and mercy, dwelling in His peace which is forever. May the Lord keep your hearts and minds upon Him. Amen.