

Seventh Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/C): "Our Father...."
Genesis 18:20-32; Luke 11:1-13
July 23-24, 2022
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Prayers learned in childhood stay with us forever. Years ago when I worked on an older adult psychiatric unit, there was a woman who suffered from dementia and didn't recognize her own children anymore. But she was a woman of great faith and recited the Hail Mary perfectly many times a day. It's usually the Lord's Prayer that Lutherans hold close to their hearts and that's indelibly engraved in their memories. (Unless we're in a virtual prayer meeting and I ask someone in the group to lead us aloud while others pray along silently. The pressure can be too much and stage fright affect memory when standing in the limelight! Folks have been known to write down the Lord's Prayer and keep it handy so if they find themselves leading they'll be sure to get it right!)

Catholics call it the Our Father because of the first two words. We call it the Lord's Prayer, as Luther does in the *Small Catechism*. Why? Why is this maybe **best-known** and definitely **well-loved** prayer known as "the Lord's Prayer"?

Right, the Lord Jesus taught it to His disciples. It's recorded in both St. Luke's and St. Matthew's Gospels, with small differences. St. Matthew has Jesus teaching it as part of the Sermon on the Mount, as an example of prayer that doesn't go on and on, but gets quickly to the heart of the matter.

"When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him." (Matt. 6:7-8)

St. Luke places the Lord's Prayer right after the story about Martha & Mary. He says the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray like John the Baptist taught **his** followers to pray. There

are many beautiful prayers in this world, but since this one is from the Lord's own lips, it's considered by Christians to be the most perfect. Here at Holy Trinity we tend to speak the traditional version and to sing the updated one which begins, "Father in Heaven, Your name be held holy," instead of "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." 'Means the same thing. Some folks prefer the older version because it's what they learned as a child; others prefer the newer version because it's easier to understand. There's no right or wrong, just personal preference! **Do you remember who taught you the prayer or how old you were when you learned it?**

So what's at the heart of this model prayer? (Let's remember Jesus was a faithful Jew. The prayer He teaches has all the elements that Jewish spirituality would include.)

- Praise
- Petition
- Longing for the future that God promises.

Last week I mentioned that line from a Flip Wilson skit where he announces, "I'm gonna pray. Anybody want something?" It's a "gimme-gimme-want-want" view of prayer, as if prayer is only about what we want God to deliver. "Give us today our daily bread" is the petition that comes closest to that. When we teach the kids Martin Luther's explanation of the Lord's Prayer we talk about how "daily bread" is actually everything we need to exist: it's food, shelter, clothing, loving family, meaningful employment, good weather, good government....

There are seven petitions/requests in all. The first 3 have to do with God: God's name being honored, God's will being done, God's Kingdom coming. We talk about praying "in Jesus' name" and that's not just about the words. It's about praying in the spirit of Jesus, praying for what Jesus

prays for. Jesus prays that the Father in Heaven is honored in all things, that we love God above all else and our neighbor as ourselves, and if we do those things, God's will **is** done and God's kingdom **does** come.

The last 4 petitions/"asks" have to do with us. We already mentioned our need for daily bread in all its forms. Then we get into our more spiritual rather than material needs:

- Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
- Lead us not into temptation.
- Deliver us from evil.

I could preach a whole sermon on each petition so we're definitely not going to do a deep dive into each one right now 😊. But forgiveness is always an issue for us. I just read a Christopher news note that said "**forgive**" can also be understood as our giving forgiveness **before** it is even asked for, or **regardless** of whether it is asked for. Forgiveness can involve one party. Reconciliation, on the other hand, requires two parties, including an acknowledgement of harm and a request for forgiveness from the one who did the wounding.

I'm leading a seven week study of Martin Luther's Small Catechism in the fall, which will include teachings about the Lord's Prayer, 10 Commandments, Apostles' Creed and the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. Please let me know if you're interested!

For today, let's ask the Holy Spirit to pray more thoughtfully, more intentionally, this familiar prayer which echoes Jesus so well. St. Teresa of Avila, the great Spanish mystic, once decided to reflect on the Lord's Prayer in her meditations. She later reported she never got beyond "Our Father" Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham

