

“Gift to spiritual weaklings.” Luke 11:1-13

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” And he said to them, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.’”

And he said to them, “Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything’? I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Prayer. What springs to mind when you hear the word “prayer”? We can say that prayer is one of those universal human experiences. Time comes when everyone prays. A while ago, we hosted an arm-wrestling friend of mine. He had no religious background at all.

He had served in Canadian special forces and done several tours to Afghanistan. In one of them it got ugly, several of his friends were killed, and he was injured. Can you guess what he did in the heat of the battle? He prayed...

Why do people pray? Why is this such a universal experience? For one, we all recognize that we are so limited. Most things in our lives are out of our control. But also, it is because of our knowledge of God. Yes! It may be obscured and unconscious, but we all have this sense built into our hearts, that there is someone higher, someone much more powerful than us, someone to whom we could cry out in our despair.

The Triune God invites; He commands us to pray. So, how good are you with that? I don't know about you, but I fail constantly. There are so many reasons why we fail. Often, we simply forget to pray, and we don't believe that our prayers matter.

We don't believe that God hears us. We are concerned about what others will think hearing us praying, perhaps it is better to leave this praying business to “the professionals”, to pastors. But we too are as hopeless as everyone else.

Even when we pray, our thoughts wander everywhere. We pray one sentence and five minutes later realize that our thoughts have been all over the place. We promise to pray for others, with good intentions, and then we forget about it.

You may be different, but this is all me. Then we may feel guilty and disappointed with our prayer practice, with letting others down. We may want to be spiritual prayer warriors, but most of the time we are more like spiritual weaklings.

Today I invite you to consider how Christian prayer is unique, radically different, and what an incredible privilege it is to be invited to pray. We will reflect on three questions. **Who do we pray to? How do we pray? Why do we pray?**

First, who do we pray to? As Christians we do not pray to some unknown cosmic force. And we do not simply decide to pray to the holy God, Ruler of the Universe and the Judge Eternal either. For that God knows our hearts. He hates sin and no sinful person can come into His presence and live. And that's all of us.

Which means, even if we knew about this Holy God, we can't just rock up, ask for something and expect His favour. That's why Christians have a very distinct approach to this holy God. What is it? Remember what the disciples asked Jesus?

"Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." And Jesus said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.""

See what happened? Jesus didn't teach them how to pray. Instead, He did something unexpected. He gave them His own prayer. Yes! How does this prayer begin? "Father! Our Father!" Think about this – who is the only person who could properly address God as Father? Of course, the only begotten Eternal Son, who has become as one of us, as Jesus from Nazareth. He is the true Son of His Heavenly Father.

He is the only One who can properly address God as Father. But... the wonderful grace of God! Through Jesus Christ God the Father not only saves His fallen human creatures from sin and death, but He also makes us members of His family.

When you are united with Jesus, when you have received the Holy Spirit in your Baptism, or by hearing the Gospel, and in the Holy Sacrament, you are included and kept in God's own family. You become adopted children of God. His children!

Now, dwell on this image for a while... God is your loving Father. As Luther puts it in the Small Catechism, He is our true and dear Father. When we think about our fathers, we may or may not get the most encouraging or comforting images.

Earthy fathers always fall short. I do. But our God is the perfect Father. Loving, kind, gentle, patient, He delights conversing with you, He longs to hear your prayers. There is nothing that we could ask wrong, there is nothing too great or too small for Him.

He looks at you as His beloved child, He knows what you need, He wants you to trust Him, He wants you to run to Him with all our cares and with all your joys. In fact, He runs to you first to embrace you. **This is who we pray to.** The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is your loving and faithful Father in heaven. Yes, He is.

Now our second question – how do we pray? When people pray, they usually do it so that someone more powerful – some divine being – would help them to change their situation the way they want it to be. It means that we want to decide how to run this world and our circumstances, and we simply ask that divine being to adjust the reality according to our instructions. We run the show. We decide what and how.

How are Christian prayers different? When Christians pray, we pray in the name of Jesus. What does this mean? It means that we pray united with Jesus, we pray together with Jesus, we submit our prayers to Jesus, and we let Him to shape and finalize our prayers.

Or we could put it this way. When Christians pray, we don't tell God what to do. When we pray, we pray that our Lord Jesus would strengthen our trust that our Father knows better, and that our prayers are in full accord with God's will.

So that what we pray would be in harmony with what Jesus Himself would pray in our situations. Now, what would He pray? Remember, He has already given us His own prayer. Let's look at what He does in this prayer.

The first petitions in the Lord's prayer are to do with the Father; the focus is on God the Father and His mission. **"Hallowed be Your Name, Your Kingdom come, Your will be done."** Or as Dr Luther summarized it:

"That the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we as the children of God also lead holy lives in accordance with it. [That] our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead a godly life.

[That] God breaks ... every evil counsel ... which would not let us hallow the name of God nor let His kingdom come ... but strengthens and keeps us steadfast in His Word and in faith unto our end." See what happens! As Jesus gives us His prayer - this is amazing! - He makes us one with Himself. He brings you into His family business.

He invites you to pray for the same things that He is praying for. But then comes a humbling surprise. One thing is that Jesus allows us to share His prayer, but we also see that in His prayer He fully identifies with us.

He prays for all our daily needs. **"Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation. [But deliver us from evil.]"**

Jesus Himself, as the Son of God, wouldn't need any of this, but now He stands with us, with you as your Brother. The way He is united with us is so intimate that Jesus Himself prays for all our needs as if those were His needs.

This is how we pray. Not pretending to know better. Being embraced in this divine fellowship, where the will of God becomes our will, and our needs and concerns become Jesus' needs and concerns. When we pray, we pray that we could fully trust in God, our Father that He knows better and wants to bless us.

Finally, why do we pray? Because... we have been given this incredible privilege. Do we realize how privileged we are? No, we don't. The Triune God is the Creator of the Universe. He has invited you to bring your concerns and advice before Him.

You have got the Father's ear for you. We all have so many things to pray for. Our sister who struggles with autoimmune disease, our brother who battles depression, our Christian friend who is unfairly kicked out of his job or has lost a spouse to cancer. Our children as we worry for their faith, our church that ages and withers, our parents on deathbed, but hostile to God's grace... and the list goes on and on.

We can't help them. We can't change their situation. We can't change their hearts. But we can bring their needs to our Father. We can entrust Him to all the people and all the situations where we are helpless, for He has all the power. And we can be fully assured that He will listen to our prayers. What a privilege!

Finally, there is something surprising in the very last verse that we read. Something we need to remember when we think about prayer. **"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you... If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"**

Ask, seek, knock and ... it will be given to you. But what will be given to you? Whatever you asked? No! Did you notice the wonderful surprise? The Holy Spirit will be given to you! What is that about? Remember who we pray – our loving and gracious Father.

When we are in need and go to loving parents' house, we knock and what happens? The doors are open, loving arms hug you and you are invited in. The same thing happens when we turn with our prayers to our Father in Heaven.

He knows what we truly need, He wants to give us the greatest of gifts. We knock, and He opens... and He invites us in. Your Father invites you to be with Him, in the divine fellowship with Him and His Son Jesus, and with all His saints.

As John the apostle wrote: **"Indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."** It is the Holy Spirit who brings you in this divine fellowship. That's why we pray. To learn to receive and to rejoice in the greatest of God's gifts. For the Father has promised to bless us abundantly with His Spirit.

The Triune God has promised to dwell with you now, and to have you with Him in the age to come. And if we who are evil give good things to our children, then how much more our Father who is in heaven will give us His Spirit!

Christian prayer... our prayer... what a wonderful gift!

You have access to your loving Father in heaven, you can bring all your needs and the needs of your loved ones to Him, and you can find peace and comfort in the fellowship with the Triune God trusting that He knows best and that He hears all your prayers.

Amen.