

### *Pray Then Like This ...*

“Let each day begin with prayer ...” So sings the old morning hymn, “With the Lord Begin Your Task” (LSB 869:2). And, in His “Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5-7), Jesus assumed His disciples would pray, and so He taught them how to do so (see Matthew 6:5-15). There we first receive those beautiful words we’ve come to know as “The Lord’s Prayer.”

How often we’ve prayed those words—and yet how little we’ve paid attention to what we’ve been saying when we’ve prayed them! Not that this is anything new. In his tract, “A Simple Way to Pray” (1535, *AE* 43:200), Martin Luther wrote:

“How many pray the Lord’s Prayer several thousand times in the course of a year, and if they were to keep on doing so for a thousand years they would not have tasted nor prayed one iota, one dot [alluding to Mt 5:18: “one jot or one tittle” (KJV)], of it! In a word, the Lord’s Prayer is the greatest martyr on earth (as are the name and word of God). Everybody tortures and abuses it; few take comfort and joy in its proper use.”

What’s Luther talking about? In his commentary on Matthew’s Gospel, Dr Jeff Gibbs puts it this way: “Luther’s words have a contemporary ring to them. What Christian has not been dismayed by his own indifference to the Lord’s prayer? What believer has not been chagrined when once again she has offered an unthinking, parrot like recitation of this prayer while at the same time mentally reviewing the possible lunch menus when the family returns home from church?” (Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1-11:1*, 346)

Yes, I too have often been on “auto-pilot” while praying the Lord’s Prayer. I’ve also found it annoying when I’ve attended other services and listened as the congregation hammered through the petitions at such a speed I could barely think about what I was praying. Part of me wants to shout out, “Slow down! Anybody can *say* the Lord’s Prayer. I want to *pray* the Lord’s Prayer!”

But Jesus didn’t tell His disciples, “Pray these words.” He said, “Pray then like this, ...” The Lord’s Prayer is, indeed, a fine prayer, but it is also a pattern for our prayers. So, rather than abuse it by mindless repetition, why not use it as Jesus said. Why not, as Dr Gibbs puts it, “begin with the Our Father and then let its petitions guide other prayers for the church, the world, the lost, the sick, and the dying?”

What would that look like? Consider this example from Divine Service, Setting Five in *Lutheran Service Book*, pages 215-216:

God, Our Father in heaven, look with mercy on us, Your needy children on earth, and grant us grace that Your holy name be hallowed by us and all the world through the pure and true teaching of Your word and the fervent love shone forth in our lives. Graciously turned from us all false doctrine and evil living whereby Your precious name is blasphemed and profaned.

May Your Kingdom come to us and expand. Bring all transgressors and those who are blinded and bound in the devil's kingdom to know Jesus Christ, Your Son, by faith that the number of Christians may be increased.

Strengthen us by Your Spirit according to Your will, both in life and in death, in the midst of both good and evil things, that our own wills may be crucified daily and sacrifice to Your good and gracious will. Into Your merciful hands we commend \_\_\_\_\_ and all who are in need, praying for them at all times Thy will be done.

Grant us our daily bread, preserve us from greed and selfish cares, and help us trust in You to provide for all our needs.

Forgive us our sins as we also forgive those who sin against us so that our hearts may be at peace and may rejoice in a good conscience before You, and that no sin may ever frighten or alarm us.

Lead us not into temptation, O Lord, but help us by Your Spirit to subdue our flesh, to turn from the world and its ways, and to overcome the devil with all his wiles.

And lastly, O heavenly Father, deliver us from all evil of both body and soul, now and forever.

We trust, O Lord, in Your great mercy to hear and answer us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.