

Pray Without Ceasing – Part Two

As noted last month, St Paul tells us to “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). This doesn’t mean we’re to spend the entire day on our knees, with eyes closed and hands folded. If that were the case, no one would carry out their God-given vocations and we’d all starve to death! Still, our lives can be prayer-filled, especially if we develop habits that regularly remind us to bring our requests to God. Martin Luther recognized this need when he wrote his *Small Catechism*, and provided patterns not just for morning and evening prayers, but also prayers at meal times.

In **Asking a Blessing**, Luther wrote, “*The children and members of the household shall go to the table reverently, fold their hands, and say: The eyes of all look to You, [O Lord,] and You give them their food at the proper time. You open Your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. (Psalm 145:15-16) Then shall be said the Lord’s Prayer and the following: Lord God, heavenly Father, bless us and these Your gifts which we receive from Your bountiful goodness, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*”

In **Returning Thanks**, Luther also wrote, “*Also, after eating, they shall, in like manner, reverently and with folded hands say: Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His love endures forever. [He] gives food to every creature. He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call. His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor His delight in the legs of a man; the Lord delights in those who fear Him, who put their hope in His unfailing love. (Psalm 136:1, 25; 147:9-11) Then shall be said the Lord’s Prayer and the following: We thank You, Lord God, heavenly Father, for all Your benefits, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.*”

Of these words, Rev. John Pless writes, “It is instructive that Luther creates something of a miniature liturgy around the family table. Just as Christians approach the altar with reverence, . . . Postures typically associated with the Divine Service [that is, our ‘folded hands’] are transported into the everyday space of the family dining room.”

Thus, “The catechism table prayers embody the truth of 1 Timothy 4:4-5: ‘For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.’ The gifts of daily bread can be received with thanksgiving only by those who know the truth that all we have in this body and life are from the hands of our Creator.” (Pless, *Praying Luther’s Small Catechism* (CPH, 2016), 125, 126).

Think of that! Daily devotions with your family, three times a day! Many have written about the deterioration of the family, and how important it is to reestablish daily family meals to undo that damage. For Christians, our mealtimes are also an opportunity to gather in faith and join together in prayer to God as well!

The world around us has made such prayers awkward for us, especially amid the noise of a restaurant. But turn that thought around: what a witness it is to others when a family prays together in public—yes, out loud—before they eat!

Yes, it is a discipline, and sometimes a difficult one. Habits can be hard to start, and hard to keep going. But such “suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Romans 5:3-5)