

Lord, teach us to pray. – Luke 11:1.

We want to learn to pray. And God will teach us in His Word.

– Prayer is an act of worship performed by the children of God. When God's children pray, they approach their heavenly Father, and speak to Him, talk with Him, and bring their petitions before Him, and offer up praise and thanks to Him. Prayer is offered both with our hearts and our lips. Prayer is the word of the mouth and the meditation of the heart. (Psalm 19:14.) To speak with the mouth only, while being unheedful of the words spoken, is babbling, and not prayer.

– God hears prayer. He hears even the faintest sigh of the heart. "Lord, Thou hast heard the desire of the humble; Thou wilt prepare their heart; Thou wilt cause Thine ear to hear." (Psalm 10:17.) Indeed, what does God say? He says: "It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." (Isaiah 65:24.) God hears and answers our prayer in advance. And never think, my dear Christian, that God desires you to make many words and to use a very fine language.

The Savior says: "When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them; for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him."

(Matthew 6:7- 8.)

We are God's children, and we are merely little children, however old we may be. So let us speak to our Father just as little children do. The simpler, the more childlike we address Him, the better He likes it. Every Christian can pray, may be he ever so unlettered a person; and the learned must forget his learning when he prays.

PRAYER. – Dear Heavenly Father, O great God, I thank You that through Jesus Christ I am Your child, and dare pray to You, and tell You all, take all my complaints and my petitions to You in prayer. And You will most graciously hear me, being as kind to me



Illustration: The Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane

A Devotional for the
Week of the Tenth Sunday after Trinity.

as a father to his child. Dear Father in heaven, grant me Your Holy Spirit, that He may open my lips and my heart, so that at all times I may come to You and pray to You, O great Fount of all grace. Amen.

Hymn 67, 3.

Grant that Thy Spirit prompt my praises,
Then shall my singing surely please Thine ear;
Sweet are the sounds my heart then raises,
My prayer in truth and spirit Thou wilt hear.
Then shall Thy Spirit raise my heart to Thee,
To sing Thee psalms of praise in high degree.

MONDAY.

Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me. – Psalm 50:15.

What should induce us to pray? What should encourage us poor, miserable sinners, but who, at the same time, are the children of God, to pray, yes, what should give us even a most earnest desire to do so?

In the first place, God's command. God demands it of us. He says: "Call upon Me!" This is not a hard and harsh command, however, but a most kind and gracious one. And we should be glad that God thus commands us to pray, and we should say to Him: "When Thou saidst, Seek ye my face, my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." (Psalm 27:8.)

Secondly, God's promise should induce us to pray. He says: "I will deliver thee." And Jesus says: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." (Matthew 7:7.) Could He have given a kinder and more assuring promise? Ought we, therefore, not to pray? St. James is right in saying: "Ye have not because ye ask not." (James 4:2.)

Thirdly, our need should induce us to pray. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble," says God. Our need is so great and manifold. We are in greater need than we know or even faintly imagine. We are in need of divine help over against the devil, the world, and our own flesh. Our body and soul both are in need. We are in need respecting both this present time and eternity. There can be no greater need than that in which we are every day. And we are entirely unable to help ourselves. Therefore God says: "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me." Should that not induce us to pray?

PRAYER. – I thank and praise You, O gracious God, that You command me to call on You in my need and helplessness. And You do promise to deliver me. O God, let me not stand afar off, neither in dread of You nor in self-reliance, but through Your Holy Spirit grant me grace to flee to You, seeking help alone with You, who are not only almighty, but are also my gracious Father through Jesus Christ, my Savior. Amen.

Hymn 515, 1. 2. 7.

WHEN in the hour of utmost need
We know not where to look for aid;
When days and nights of anxious thought
Nor help nor counsel yet have brought:

Then this our comfort is alone,
That we may meet before Thy throne,
And cry, O faithful God, to Thee
For rescue from our misery;

That so with all our hearts we may
Once more our glad thanksgivings pay,
And walk obedient to Thy Word,
And now and ever praise Thee, Lord.

TUESDAY.

Thou shalt worship the Lord, thy God, and Him alone shalt thou serve. – Matthew 4:10.

To whom should we pray? Surely, you are not in doubt about this. We should pray only to the true God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. He, the Triune God, is the only true God. And we have learned to know Him from His Word. Everything that is called God beside Him is an idol, an imaginary, a man-made god.

Wherever such an idol is worshiped, as among the Jews, the Unitarians, and the lodges, you trust not take part in such sinful worship. "Nonsense!" some say, "why, there is but one God." They mean to say that one may also pray to the so-called god of the people just mentioned. It is true, there is but one God. But this one God is the Triune God. Whatever else is held to be a god is an idol. Is it right for you to pray to idols, to take part in idol worship?

Nor must thou call on the holy angels. Though they are highly exalted, they are but ministering spirits who carry out God's will and command. They cannot hear and grant prayer. David – by the Holy Spirit – says to God: "O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come." (Psalm 6:2.)

And what are we to think of the invocation of saints as practiced in the Roman Catholic Church? Listen to what the prophet says to God: "Doubtless Thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not. Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer; Thy name is from everlasting." (Isaiah 63:16.) The saints in heaven, the real saints, are ignorant of us and acknowledge us not and hear us not. And the saints of the Pope's making are nothing.

We should pray to God alone, who is our Father and our Redeemer and our Comforter: He hears and grants our prayer; He is almighty and most gracious to us.

PRAYER. – O true, gracious, and loving God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, who has revealed Yourself to me so graciously to my

salvation, and who so kindly invites me to call on You: why should I address my prayer to any one but to You alone? Far be it from me to do so! Do but grant me grace to address You with full confidence, and unceasingly seek Your grace and help, firmly believing that You will surely hear my prayer. Amen.

Hymn 20, 4.

My Maker, strengthen Thou my heart,
O my Redeemer, help impart,
Blest Comforter, keep at my side,
That faith and love in me abide.

WEDNESDAY.

Be careful for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be made known unto God. – Philippians 4:6.

What should we ask for in our prayers? – Dear Christian, do you not see what God says? Instead of caring and fretting and worrying, make your request known to God in everything by prayer and supplication, thanking Him with all your heart for being your gracious God, who desires your prayer. Ask God for everything in prayer. Nothing is excepted. You may ask God for the very greatest of things. Nothing is too great for Him to give. And you may ask God for the most trifling things. Nothing is, too small or trifling for your dear, loving heavenly Father to consider.

Above all things, however, ask God for the great and glorious spiritual blessings which are necessary for your spiritual welfare, for your eternal salvation. Every Christian knows that this is of prime importance. And also ask God for the temporal blessings which are necessary for the preservation of this life. But you must act as a loving child of God should, and not in presumptuous ignorance,

perchance, ask God for things that conflict with the glory of God and with your temporal and spiritual welfare. Jesus said: "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." (Mark 11:24.) But can you truly believe that God will give you something that would not promote His divine glory nor your temporal and spiritual welfare? God's glory is advanced only when He gives us really good gifts.

O Christian, be careful for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God. But always retain a childlike mind, which firmly believes that God knows best what is truly good and wholesome for you. -We shall hear more of this to-morrow.

PRAYER. – I thank You, my dear Heavenly Father, that through the gracious promise You have given, You rid me of each and every care, and tell me to call on You, and to trust that You will give me what is best for me in time and eternity. Give to me, O kind Father, the Spirit of adoption, that I may confidently and joyfully entrust my fate entirely to You, always looking up to You, always calling on You; for You are my most gracious God through Jesus Christ, my Savior. Amen.

Hymn 395, 1. 2.

WHAT a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear;
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer,
Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear –
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged,
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Can we find a Friend so faithful,
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness,
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

THURSDAY.

Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but Thine, be done. – Luke 22:42.

We must observe a distinction in offering up our prayers. When asking for things that are necessary for our salvation, we must simply ask without affixing any condition to our prayer. And God will surely grant our prayer, for He has promised to do so. Our Lord and Savior says: "If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" (Luke 11:13.) And "this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us." (2 John 5:14.)

It is otherwise when we ask for something that is not absolutely necessary for our salvation, and something that God has not expressly promised us. Faith of such high degree as Paul, for instance, or even Luther possessed, and particular gifts of the Holy Ghost, are precious spiritual gifts indeed, but not absolutely necessary for our salvation, and the Holy Spirit "divides unto every man severally as He will." (1 Corinthians 12:11.)

The same thing holds true with regard to immediate deliverance from spiritual temptation or bodily affliction. Is this necessary for our salvation? On the contrary, is not such temptation and affliction wholesome for us? And do you think that the constant enjoyment of good health, good fortune, and an abundance of this world's goods is always wholesome for us and our loved ones, or even necessary for our salvation? When asking for such things; and surely you may do so, – then learn of Jesus, the very best of teachers. When in the

Garden of Gethsemane He had to drink that cup of bitterest soul-agonies, He prayed most fervently, indeed, that this cup might be removed from Him, but He added: "Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but Thine, be done."

Thus you, too, must pray in all matters not necessary for your salvation. Leave it to the will of your heavenly Father, who dearly loves you, and who surely desires your salvation, whether, and when, and how many of these things He wishes to give to you.

PRAYER. – My dear Heavenly Father, faithful God, I know of a certainty that You dearly love me and desire my salvation, and profusely and abundantly give to me all things necessary for my salvation. For this I thank You with all my heart. Give to me, dear Father, Your Holy Spirit, that I may be willing to leave everything else to Your loving-kindness and Your divine wisdom, firmly believing that with tender love and faithfulness You will keep me and lovingly take care of me, until You will gather me to the community of Your elect in heaven, who praise and glorify You in all eternity. Amen.

Hymn 383, 1.

LORD, as Thou wilt, deal Thou with me,
No other wish I cherish;
In life and death I cling to Thee,
O Lord, let me not perish!
Let but Thy grace ne'er from me part,
Else as Thou wilt; grant patient heart:
Thy will the best is ever.

FRIDAY.

Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father! – Galatians 4:6.

Those who do not believe in our dear Savior Jesus Christ cannot truly pray, nor in a manner well pleasing to God. For they neither know nor accept the grace and love of God which is to be found only in Jesus Christ, and embraced only through faith in Him. They are subject to the wrath of God. How can they truly pray? How can they have the childlike confidence in God necessary for a true prayer? How can their prayer be acceptable and well pleasing to God?

– No, unbelievers cannot pray. But we poor sinners who believe in our Savior Jesus Christ are God's dear children. And God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, who cries from within us and together with us: "Abba, Father!" We can truly pray, and in a manner well pleasing to God. We have the grace of God, we are holy and beloved. We always pray *in the name of Jesus Christ*. In all our prayer and supplication we make this plea, that through Jesus Christ we have been reconciled to God. And from within us and together with us the Holy Spirit always prays and supplicates, the Spirit of our Savior, whom the Savior has sent into our hearts.

Thus do we pray with a confidence acceptable unto God. We rely on and we plead the word of our Savior: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you." (John 16:23.) We are led by the Spirit of Christ, who is also the Spirit of the Father, to tell our heavenly Father everything, like little children, all our troubles, and always to trust that He will graciously grant our prayer and give us the best and most salutary gifts.

Behold, dear Christian, this is true prayer.

PRAYER. – Ah, my Heavenly Father, at all times give me the right teacher to teach me how to pray, Your Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Your dear Son, my Savior, that in the name of this, my Atoner, I may pray to You, and that in true faith and with joyful confidence I may commit myself into Your outstretched, almighty arms. And then hear my prayer, O Father, and richly, abundantly give me all that is good, wholesome, and salutary for me, and fill my poor heart with peace and joy. Amen.

Hymn 67, 6.

And what Thy Spirit thus hath taught me
To seek from Thee, must needs be such a prayer
As Thou wilt grant, through Him who bought me,
And raised me up to be Thy child and heir;
In Jesus' name I fearless seek Thy face,
And take from Thee, my Father, grace for grace.

SATURDAY.

Pray for one another. – James 5:16.

You must not only pray for yourself, my dear Christian, but also for others. Christians should pray for one another. Since you should love your neighbor as yourself, you should also pray for your neighbor as for yourself. Pray for your loved ones, whom God has united with you by ties of kinship. Pray for your friends; this is the greatest possible favor you can bestow on them. Pray for your fellow Christians, that the grace of God may always abide with them. Pray for him whom you see erring. Pray for your enemy. The Savior says: "Pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you." (Matthew 5:44.) If you pray for your enemy, you will surely love him: for you can not hate him for whom you pray.

Do not forget your preacher, your pastor, when you pray. The Apostle Paul asked for such intercession. (Ephesians 6:19 & Colossians 4:3) And the same Apostle admonishes us to pray "for all men." (1 Timothy 2:1.) This is in accord with the gracious will of God that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of truth. There are Christians who make a list of those for whom they wish to pray particularly, and who daily put this list before them when they pray in private. That is a very good thing to do.

– But you must not pray for the dead. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." (Hebrews 9:27.) God has judged the dead. Their souls are either with the blessed in heaven or

with the damned in hell. It is a violation of the honor of God to pray for the dead. God judges righteously. But pray, *pray*, PRAY for those who are still living, for they still live in the day of salvation.

PRAYER. – Lord, merciful God, who desires that we, Your children, pray for one another, pour out on me, I beg You, the Spirit of love and of prayer, that I may gladly and willingly, diligently and fervently do according to this Your will, and that I may firmly believe that my intercession is not in vain, but moves You most mercifully to have compassion on my neighbor, for You gladly help us through Jesus Christ, the world's Savior. Amen.

Hymn 38, 4.

Through Thy Beloved soothe the sick and weeping,
And bid the captive lose his griefs in sleeping;
Widows and orphans, we to Thee commend them,
Do Thou befriend them.

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