

# **Praying in Christ's Name**

**Based on**

**Martin Luther's 1537 Sermons on John 14 and 16**

**Translated**

**by**

**Holger Sonntag**

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## Introduction

The text selected for this work on prayer is taken from the sermons on John 14 to 16 Martin Luther (1483-1546) preached at Wittenberg between Easter and Pentecost 1537.<sup>1</sup> This was a particularly fitting time in the church year for this portion of the gospel of John. This is because—according to the traditional Western lectionary Luther substantially retained, despite some misgivings<sup>2</sup>—the gospel lessons for the Sundays from the Third Sunday after Easter to Pentecost Sunday were taken from these three chapters of John. These lessons include the one for the Fifth Sunday after Easter, Rogate Sunday, John 16:23-30.

The translation of the selections in this volume is based on the German text printed in volume 8 of the St. Louis Edition of Luther's works.<sup>3</sup> This text is based on the text of the sermons prepared for publication by Caspar Cruciger (1504-1548).<sup>4</sup> Luther spoke very highly of the published version of his sermons, even calling it his "most precious book" next to the Bible itself.<sup>5</sup> The reader is directed to volume 24 of the American Edition of Luther's works for an alternative translation of the selection contained in this volume and for a complete translation of Luther's marvelous sermons on John 14 to 16.

### *Luther as a Theologian of Prayer*

Luther is generally known as a reformer of the church, as the one who rediscovered the gospel of justification by grace through faith in Christ. Lesser known is the fact that Luther was also one who was deeply engaged in prayer throughout his life as a practitioner and as a professor of the Bible at Wittenberg. In fact, for Luther, all theology was prayer in thanksgiving and praise of God.<sup>6</sup>

Accordingly, Luther not only knew the psalms by heart based on his life-long practice of praying and studying them, beginning at Erfurt University.<sup>7</sup> Luther also lectured on the psalms from the beginning of his service as a professor of theology to its end. In fact, Luther's first preserved

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<sup>1</sup> Luther's Works: American Edition (AE) 24:ix. Luther therefore preached these sermons after his return from the assembly of Protestant princes at Schmalkalden in March 1537. For historical context on the 1537 Schmalkalden assembly—including the assembly's failure to adopt the articles of faith Luther had drafted in preparation of the Council at Mantua scheduled for later that year, as well as Luther's life-threatening kidney problems—see M. Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church, 1532-1546*, tr. J. L. Schaaf (1999), 3:178-188.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., AE 52:102; 53:23-24.

<sup>3</sup> St. Louis Edition 8:348-364, 375-377, 699-720.

<sup>4</sup> AE 24:ix.

<sup>5</sup> AE 24:ix.

<sup>6</sup> M. Mikoteit, *Theologie und Gebet bei Luther* (2004), p. 301-302. See also AE 43:193-194: "There is a saying ascribed to St. Jerome that everything a believer does is prayer and a proverb, 'He who works faithfully prays twice.' This can be said because a believer fears and honors God in his work and remembers the commandment not to wrong anyone, or to try to steal, defraud, or cheat. Such thoughts and such faith undoubtedly transform his work into prayer and a sacrifice of praise."

<sup>7</sup> M. Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521*, tr. J. L. Schaaf (1993), 1:32, 64-65. As Brecht notes there, during his time in the monastery, Luther also became acquainted with the superficiality and legalism that marked the canonical hours at that time and place.

theological lecture—delivered in the early 1510s<sup>8</sup>—was on the psalms.<sup>9</sup> In 1531, Luther published his *Summaries of the Psalms*.<sup>10</sup> Lectures on various psalms—culminating in his lecture on Psalm 90<sup>11</sup>—were Luther’s last theological lectures in the 1530s before he, in 1535, embarked on his last major academic project, his decade-long lectures on Genesis.<sup>12</sup>

Additionally, Luther published several treatises and comments about prayer. For instance, in 1519, he published an exposition of the Lord’s Prayer, the Our Father, for simple laymen.<sup>13</sup> Also in 1519, he published a short tract, *On Rogationtide Prayer and Procession*, at the beginning of which he outlines the basics of true prayer.<sup>14</sup> In 1522, he published a *Personal Prayer Book*, containing an exposition of the Ten Commandment, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer, a brief discussion of (the Hail) Mary, various psalms, the text of Paul’s letter to Titus, and (beginning in 1529) a series of woodcuts depicting the key events from the creation of the world to Christ’s return in glory.<sup>15</sup> In 1529/1530, he addressed the Our Father again in his two catechisms, the *Small Catechism* and the *Large Catechism*, as well as the sermons he preached in preparation of the catechisms. In 1532, Luther’s sermons on the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7, were published, which contained, based on Matthew 6:7-13, a brief discussion of prayer and the Our Father.<sup>16</sup> In 1535, Luther wrote *A Simple Way to Pray*, where he shared the way in which he himself prayerfully meditated on the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Our Father itself.<sup>17</sup> In 1539, in his preface to the Wittenberg edition of his German works, Luther commends prayer for the Holy Spirit—in addition to meditation and temptation—as the first step in the proper study of the Scriptures, that is, in becoming a true theologian.<sup>18</sup>

#### *Summary of Luther’s 1537 Sermons on Prayer*

In his 1537 sermons on John, Luther followed Christ in locating the institution of the new prayer *in Christ’s name* at the beginning of the age of the New Testament in the death, resurrection, and ascension of the God-man, Jesus Christ, to the right hand of the Father.

Luther also followed Christ in locating this prayer in the new life of the Christian. Based on John 14:12-14, Luther discussed how the Christians—the apostles and all who believe in Christ as their only Savior based on the preaching of the apostles—continue and exceed the works Christ performed during his earthly life in Judea. As Luther explained, they do so by administering the means of grace—the gospel, baptism, and the sacrament of the altar—and by prayer. By the

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<sup>8</sup> AE 10 and 11.

<sup>9</sup> Brecht, *Luther*, 1:129.

<sup>10</sup> An English translation of these summaries is available under the title, *Reading the Psalms with Luther* (2007). The first part of Luther’s work defends Luther’s German translation of the psalms. Its translation is found in AE 35:209-223.

<sup>11</sup> AE 13:75-207.

<sup>12</sup> Brecht, *Luther*, 3:134-136.

<sup>13</sup> AE 42:19-81.

<sup>14</sup> AE 42:86-93.

<sup>15</sup> AE 43:11-45.

<sup>16</sup> AE 21:141-155.

<sup>17</sup> AE 43:193-211.

<sup>18</sup> AE 34:285-286. This triad has been frequently commented upon. For a recent example, see G. L. Isaac, *Prayer, Meditation and Spiritual Trial: Luther’s Account of Life in the Spirit* (2017).

means of grace, they save souls from despair and eternal damnation—works far greater than even raising the dead. By prayer, they obtain everything good for themselves and their neighbors.

It is by prayer, then, that Christians effectively restore and preserve governments, peace, health and all good things in this life. This is why Luther praises the prayer of the Christians, along with God’s order and institution, as one of the two pillars on which the entire world rests. As a result, Christians—although poor and weak in themselves—are the lords, gods, and saviors of the entire world, whose prayer supplies every good thing to all people.

But, as Luther explained, this amazing power of their prayer does not reside in the Christians by nature, nor does it ever become theirs to use and manipulate at will. It is theirs only because (and only for as long as) they are connected by faith to Christ, their Head, who is seated at the right hand of the Father after his ascension. Put differently, the Christians are what they are, and their prayer is as efficacious as it is, because Christ has poured out on them the Spirit of grace and prayer, according to Zechariah 12:10. By grace, they are God’s children. As God’s children, they become the world’s saviors and gods by praying the Our Father in Christ’s name, without ever ceasing to pray, even when they are not conscious of it.

Praying “in Christ’s name” is, therefore, not a magical incantation or a mere liturgical formula one customarily adds at the end of a prayer. Rather, these words capture the very essence of true prayer—it proceeds from faith in Christ. This faith does not coexist with trust in other human or angelic intercessors or co-redeemers (much less with trust in their own worthiness or spiritual abilities), as that would be contrary to the First Commandment.

Luther concluded his discussion of prayer in John 14 by pointing out that the simple yet amazing way Christ teaches prayer in this chapter shows that he is true God, of one substance with the Father, and that Christ and the Father both work in and through the Christians in this world and are glorified together in one glory, according to the ancient common rule that the works of God outside the Trinity are indivisible.<sup>19</sup>

Based on John 16:23-24, where Christ returned to prayer after he had concluded the doctrinal part of his farewell discourse, Luther discussed the critical gap between theory and practice in the life of the Christian, so to speak. Put differently, Luther, with Christ, identifies prayer as the indispensable means to progress from having correct knowledge of the doctrine of faith and morals to beginning to live one’s daily life as a Christian according to this knowledge.<sup>20</sup>

As Luther explained, it is impossible to proceed from having Christian knowledge to leading a Christian life without prayer, because the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh do not want us to proceed in this way. That is why the devil is especially keen on preventing Christians to pray—because he is fully aware of the great power of, and the great need for, prayer.

Luther discussed the three chief obstacles the devil—aided and abetted by our own sinful flesh (the old Adam)—throws in the way of true prayer, namely, lack of preparedness; lack of

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<sup>19</sup> AE 15:302, 311.

<sup>20</sup> See LC III, 1-2, 29-34.

worthiness; and lack of receiving a response from God. By these obstacles, the devil turns true prayer into the most difficult work on earth, even more difficult than preaching the gospel.

The remedy against these powerful obstacles is not allowing them to deter prayer. But this seemingly simple remedy is impossible where prayer is not grounded on three solid foundations—God’s command to pray in the name of Christ; God’s promise to hear prayer in the name of Christ; and the very words of the Our Father taught by Christ himself.<sup>21</sup>

In the context of discussing the three obstacles to true prayer, Luther addressed the issue of prayers that seemingly go unanswered. Pointing to the Our Father, he emphasized that Christians should follow the priorities established in this prayer: We should first pray for God’s things (his name, his kingdom, his will), then we should also pray for the things we need for this life set forth in the remaining four petitions.

Luther also pointed out, based on Romans 8, that it is too lofty for us to know how we ought to pray or how God ought to fulfill the petitions he has given us to pray in the Our Father. That is why we should leave the specifics of this fulfillment—the manner, time, place, and persons—to God’s wisdom who arranges all things for our eternal advantage.

The unfulfilled prayer, then, is the one prayed in unavoidable ignorance. But this should not deter us from praying in full confidence the very words Christ has given us to pray in the Our Father, as he has undoubtedly commanded us to do. As Luther explained elsewhere, even when it comes to prayer, we must cling to God’s revealed will—as set forth, e.g., in the Our Father—and not speculate about his hidden will.<sup>22</sup>

Luther concluded his discussion of prayer on John 16 by making two additional points. First, he discussed the newness of “prayer in Christ’s name” in the age of the New Testament inaugurated by Christ’s death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the Father. While the Old Testament saints also prayed in the name of Christ, their prayer was in the name of the Christ who was yet to come. By contrast, true prayer in the age of the New Testament is offered in the name of the Christ who has come, who has died, who is risen—and whose gospel is preached to the ends of the earth. Praying and doing everything in the name of the Christ who has come—that is the worship of the New Testament that is uniformly focused on this Christ and that makes even the old psalms new.<sup>23</sup>

Second, Luther—again drawing on the Our Father—discussed the relationship between prayer and joy in the life of the Christian. True Christian joy is structured according to the Our Father, so that the Christians’ greatest joy is the hallowing of God’s name, the coming of his kingdom, and doing of God’s will, while it is their greatest sadness when they see that these things are hindered—in themselves and in the world in general.

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<sup>21</sup> See LC III, 8, 17, 19, 22.

<sup>22</sup> E.g., AE 3:289; AE 28:262; see also AE 2:43-49 (on Genesis 6:6).

<sup>23</sup> Newness in the church’s song and prayer is, therefore, a spiritual category, not one related to time. Luther pointed this out already in his first lecture on the psalms by stating, among other pertinent things, “the newer or more recent a person is *in the soul*, the newer and more recent he can make one and the same song.” AE 10:154 (on Psalm 33:3); see AE 53:332-333 (on Psalm 96:1 in a preface to a hymnal).

Receiving help for this life according to the last four petitions is reason for joy to the extent this help is employed for the fulfillment of the first three petitions among us. True Christian joy, therefore, does not consist in amassing worldly possessions—including political power, wealth, and health amounting to the Christian’s “best life now”—as ends in themselves, as advertised by the “prosperity gospel.” Rejoicing in these things for their own sakes, Luther warned, is impure and will be destroyed by death. This is why the joy of the Christians will be complete first in heaven where the petitions of the Our Father be fulfilled perfectly.

*Luther’s 1537 Sermons on Prayer in the Broader Context of His Theology of Prayer*

A couple additional remarks on prayer are in place to draw out a few aspects that are featured in Luther’s exposition of John 14 and 16. First, his exposition opens by linking the prayer and spiritual lordship of Christians to their risen and ascended Lord by faith. Luther’s seminal 1520 treatise on Christian liberty explained this connection as the Christians’ participation in Christ’s kingly and priestly offices by faith:

[J]ust as Christ by his birthright obtained these two prerogatives [of being a king and a priest], so he imparts them to and shares them with everyone who believes in him . . . . Hence all of us who believe in Christ are priests and kings in Christ, as 1 Pet. 2[:9] says; “You are a chosen race, God’s own people, a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

The nature of this priesthood and kingship is something like this: First, with respect to the kingship, every Christian is by faith so exalted above all things that, by virtue of a spiritual power, he is lord of all things without exception, so that nothing can do him any harm. As a matter of fact, all things are made subject to him and are compelled to serve him in obtaining salvation. Accordingly Paul says in Rom. 8[:28], “All things work together for good for the elect,” and in 1 Cor. 3[:21–23], “All things are yours whether . . . life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ’s . . . .” This is not to say that every Christian is placed over all things to have and control them by physical power . . . . The power of which we speak is spiritual. It rules in the midst of enemies and is powerful in the midst of oppression. . . . This is a splendid privilege and hard to attain, a truly omnipotent power, a spiritual dominion in which there is nothing so good and nothing so evil but that it shall work together for good to me, if only I believe. Yes, since faith alone suffices for salvation, I need nothing except faith exercising the power and dominion of its own liberty. Lo, this is the inestimable power and liberty of Christians.

Not only are we the freest of kings, we are also priests forever, which is far more excellent than being kings, for as priests we are worthy to appear before God to pray for others and to teach one another divine things. These are the functions of priests, and they cannot be granted to any unbeliever. Thus Christ has made it possible for us, provided we believe in him, to be not only his brethren, co-heirs,

and fellow-kings, but also his fellow-priests. Therefore we may boldly come into the presence of God in the spirit of faith [Heb. 10:19, 22] and cry “Abba, Father!” pray for one another, and do all things which we see done and foreshadowed in the outer and visible works of priests.<sup>24</sup>

Additionally, in this exposition of John 14 and 16, Luther pointed to David and his psalms as models of true prayer in that David did not wait until he became good enough to cry out to God. Rather, David called upon God in the midst of sin. In his preface to his translation of the psalms, Luther commended the psalms because they—more than the other books of the Bible—recorded the very words and prayers of the saints. By doing so, the psalms “picture[] for us real, living, active saints” and allow us to “look into their hearts and see what kind of thoughts they had, how their hearts were disposed, and how they acted in all kinds of situations, in danger and in need.”<sup>25</sup> Luther summarized his praise of the psalms as follows:

[I]f you would see the holy Christian Church painted in living color and shape, comprehended in one little picture, then take up the Psalter. There you have a fine, bright, pure mirror that will show you what Christendom is. Indeed you will find in it also yourself and the true *gnothi seauton* [know thyself], as well as God himself and all creatures.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, private prayer for Luther was a two-way street: We speak to God; God speaks to us. Yet, contrary to a widespread misunderstanding, prayer is not a way for Christians to receive direct revelations of God’s hidden will beyond the written Word of God because that would disconnect the Holy Spirit from Scripture.<sup>27</sup> In his *A Simple Way to Pray*, Luther explained this seeming paradox when commending his practice of praying biblically-sound paraphrases of the individual petitions of the Lord’s Prayer, of the Ten Commandments, and of the three articles of the creed, as set forth, e.g., in the *Small Catechism* and in *A Simple Way*:

I do not bind myself to such words or syllables, but say my prayers in one fashion today, in another tomorrow, depending upon my mood and feeling. *I stay however, as nearly as I can*, with the same general thoughts and ideas. It may happen occasionally that I may get lost among so many ideas in one petition that I forego the other six. If such an abundance of good thoughts comes to us we ought to disregard the other petitions, make room for such thoughts, listen in silence, and under no circumstances obstruct them. *The Holy Spirit himself preaches here*, and one word of his sermon is far better than a thousand of our prayers. Many times I

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<sup>24</sup> AE 31:354-355. A popular edition of this treatise is available from Lutheran Press under the title, *How to Live a Christian Life*.

<sup>25</sup> AE 35:254-255.

<sup>26</sup> AE 35:256-257.

<sup>27</sup> E.g., SA III, VIII, 3-13. See also AE 24:362, on John 16:13: “Here Christ makes the Holy Spirit a Preacher . . . to prevent one from gaping toward heaven in search of Him, as the fluttering spirits and enthusiasts do, and from divorcing Him from the oral Word or the ministry.” A popular edition of a different sermon Luther preached on the work of the Holy Spirit based on John 16:8-13 is available from Lutheran Press under the title, *Convicted by the Spirit*.

have learned more from one prayer than I might have learned from much reading and speculation.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, Luther's exposition of John 14 and 16 pointed to prayer in the church's corporate worship both as model and encouragement for individual prayer. In his famous 1544 Torgau sermon, Luther adds this important facet. Pointing to Christ's specific promises regarding communal prayer in Matthew 18:19-20, Luther stated that when Christians are gathered *in unity*, "their prayers are twice as strong as otherwise. One can and one really should pray in every place and every hour; but prayer is nowhere so mighty and strong as when the whole multitude prays together."<sup>29</sup> Relatedly, Luther described public prayer—including the Our Father, as well as "psalms and other spiritual songs . . . in accordance with the word of God and the true faith"—as one of the church's true relics (i.e., things left behind by Christ) by which the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, and enlightens his holy people and by which, therefore, the holy Christian Church on earth is recognized.<sup>30</sup>

Additionally, Luther's sermons on John repeatedly make derogatory comments on those who confuse the length of their prayers with the strength of true prayer in Christ's name. In the background of this critique is Luther's advice—given elsewhere based on Christ's warning in Matthew 6 (and Luther's own experience in the monastery)—that a Christian's prayer ought to be short, name a specific need of the Christian or the neighbor, and flow from a heart that believes in Christ's promise. Preaching on Matthew 6, Luther stated:

[T]he man who is serious in his intentions and takes pleasure in prayer neither knows nor feels any toil and trouble; he simply looks at his need, and he has finished singing or praying the words before he has a chance to turn around. In other words, *prayers ought to be brief, frequent, and intense*. For God does not ask how much and how long you have prayed, but how good the prayer is and whether it proceeds from the heart.<sup>31</sup>

As Luther did in his sermons on John 14 and 16, he frequently drew on the wisdom of the fathers—that is, the esteemed theologians of the past—to highlight key aspects of prayer. On the brevity and simplicity of true prayer—as well as on the importance of serving one's neighbor in one's vocation instead of pursuing a "contemplative" life in self-chosen idleness and isolation from the neighbor—Luther recounted a story involving the hermit Anthony (251-356) who lived in the Egyptian desert<sup>32</sup> and a simple cobbler in Alexandria (Egypt). When it was revealed to Anthony in a dream that he would share eternal life with a cobbler in Alexandria, he went to see the man, asking him questions to see what elaborate way of worship and holy living the cobbler might have chosen for himself as a sure path to heaven. The simple man's answer left Anthony amazed:

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<sup>28</sup> AE 43:198.

<sup>29</sup> AE 51:337-338; see AE 67:416.

<sup>30</sup> AE 41:146.

<sup>31</sup> AE 21:143. In the *Large Catechism*, Luther also underscored the importance of feeling "our need, the distress that impels and drives us to cry out." LC III, 26.

<sup>32</sup> Luther called him "the originator of the monastic way of life." AE 4:56.

[Anthony] said: “Please, my dear cobbler, I know that you worship God faithfully and serve Him truly. Tell me, therefore, what you do, what you eat, what you drink, how or when you pray. You do not spend entire nights without sleep when you devote yourself to prayer, do you?” “Not at all,” said the cobbler. “In the morning and in the evening I give thanks to God for His faithful protection and guidance. I ask for forgiveness of all my sins for Christ’s sake, and I humbly pray that He would guide me with His Spirit and not lead me into temptation. After this prayer I get busy with my leather and provide sustenance for myself and those who are mine. Besides this I do nothing except to beware lest anywhere I do something against my conscience.”<sup>33</sup>

Luther followed the cobbler’s example when he devised simple morning and evening prayers for the *Small Catechism* to move the Christian from rest to activity and back to rest *and forgiveness*. As a result, these simple prayers surround the Christian’s rest and vocational life according to the Ten Commandments.

Additionally, these simple prayers underscore the critical importance of faith in Christ as the source of true prayer by following the sequence of faith (creed) and prayer (including the Our Father). In his lectures on Genesis, Luther explained this sequence as follows:

[Y]ou will never pray successfully in private unless you have preached to yourself either the Creed or some other passage of Scripture that draws your attention to the goodness of God as the One who has not only commanded you to pray but has also added the promise that He will hear you.

The same thing takes place publicly in our churches. We have no silent forms of worship, but the voice of the Gospel is always heard. Through it men are taught about the will of God. And to the sermons we add prayers or thanksgivings.<sup>34</sup>

Christian prayer therefore arises out of the riches of God—offered to all in the promise of the gospel and grasped by faith alone—not out of the poverty (or perceived riches) of our hearts.

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<sup>33</sup> AE 4:56-57. Luther’s is a slightly modified version of an account concerning Anthony that goes back at least to the 5th century. See AE 41:125. In 1544, Luther persuaded Georg Major (1502-1574) to publish a doctrinally sound revision of the early-church collection of the lives and sayings of the desert fathers, commonly known as *Lives of the Fathers*. See AE 60:315-323. In Major’s more straightforward version, the cobbler, when asked by Anthony what great works he performed, replied that he did not know anything about good works. Rather, he said to himself every morning and evening that all the inhabitants of Alexandria will enter the kingdom of God because they are more righteous than he was, while he was worthy only of eternal punishment due to his sins, unless he believed that he would be saved because of God’s mercy. G. Major, *Vitae patrum in usum ministrorum verbi* (1560), fol. 242v. Without reference to faith, salvation, or God’s mercy, the story is presented as an example of humility in the 17th-century edition of the *Lives of the Fathers* prepared by Dutch Jesuit theologian, H. Rosweyde, *Vitae patrum* (1628), p. 671-672 (= Migne Patrologia Latina 73:785).

<sup>34</sup> AE 2:333; see AE 43:193: “[W]hen I feel that I have become cool and joyless in prayer because of other tasks or thoughts (for the flesh and the devil always impede and obstruct prayer), I take my little psalter, hurry to my room, or, if it be the day and hour for it, to the church where a congregation is assembled and, as time permits, I say quietly to myself and word-for-word the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and, if I have time, some words of Christ or of Paul, or some psalms.”

Finally, as Luther noted in his sermons on John 14 and 16 and as every Christian knows from experience, it is very easy to get distracted in prayer.<sup>35</sup> This is one reason why true prayer is such a difficult work. And it is also a reason to keep prayer short, fervent, and focused on a concrete need, as Luther noted on Matthew 6. Drawing on the wisdom of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), as Luther frequently did in his sermons on John and elsewhere, Luther recounted an event from Bernard's life:

A prayer of this kind is praised in the case of the man who had made a bet with Bernard that he would say the Lord's Prayer without any wandering thoughts. But since they had staked a horse and, in accordance with their agreement, he was forced to confess the truth after finishing his prayer, he confessed that while he was praying, he had been concerned about the saddle and the bridle, whether these had to be added to the horse or not.<sup>36</sup> The prayer of the godly should not be like this, because this prayer is not spoken in a straightforward manner. Instead, the heart wanders now to the right and now to the left. But a true and fervent prayer presents the case to God and with great zeal and fervor directs its attention to this matter alone. It is not disturbed either by any presumption or by any doubt; it says: "Lord God, consider this afflicted little woman and Thy promise." [Gen. 25:21] It neither thinks of nor is concerned about anything else. And this is that unremitting, that is, earnest and straightforward, prayer of a righteous man of which the Epistle of James (5:16) speaks.<sup>37</sup>

May God use Luther's teachings on prayer to encourage us to pray—earnestly, straightforwardly, and ceaselessly—in Christ's name.

Holger Sonntag  
Rogate Sunday, 2026

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<sup>35</sup> See AE 43:198-199.

<sup>36</sup> A more detailed account of this bet is found in the *Golden Legend*, a medieval bestseller. See J. de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, tr. W. G. Ryan (2012), p. 490. On other instances where Luther cited Bernard on prayer, see F. Posset, *Pater Bernhardus: Martin Luther and Bernard of Clairvaux* (2018), p. 112-120; F. Posset, "Bernhard von Clairvauxs Sermonen zur Weihnachts-, Fasten- und Osterzeit als Quelle Martin Luthers," *Lutherjahrbuch* (1994) 61:93-116, esp. p. 107-109.

<sup>37</sup> AE 4:342.

## Praying in Christ's Name

*Doing Greater Works than Christ in Church and World Because He Goes to the Father*

*Truly, truly, I tell you, whoever believes in me will also do the works I do, and will do greater works than these, because I go to the Father.*

John 14:12

Here Christ again returns to the comfort which he began to provide to the disciples at the beginning of this chapter. There, he said that they should not be terrified nor grieve that he would go from them bodily or visibly, while leaving them in the world. Instead, they should consider and take comfort in the benefit and advantage they would have instead of the insignificant bodily deprivation: Christ would prepare much more glorious dwellings while still remaining with them in order to bring them where he is. Without him, they could not get there. Moreover, they would already know the way and the Father because Christ had carried out the purpose for which he was with them. There was no need for him to teach them anymore. All that was left for him to do was to bring it about and to help them to get where they should be.

So that they might have all the more comfort and experience no deprivation or damage on account of his leaving, and so that they might be graced all the more richly and gloriously, he now adds to this previous comfort the following: On account of his leaving, they would receive the grace of doing the same works that he had did, as well as greater works than the ones he had done, or would yet do while he was with them bodily. He just said that he did such works so that they might believe that the Father is in him and that he is in the Father (John 14:11). So he now leads them down and says that they too would do such works by which the people would experience that the disciples are in Christ and that Christ is in them, as he will say later on (John 14:20). For here he indicates what he will do and accomplish in them and through them in Christendom, as we will hear.

But you might say: Christ just said that we should believe on account of the works he does etc. Why does he now say here that they would do the very same works? What need is there, then, for them to believe on account of his works? Answer: What he said before was regarding how things go before we become Christians, because he talks about the works by which he makes us Christians. But now he talks about the works that are to take place by those who have become Christians. This is why he says: "Whoever believes in me" etc. We must therefore first cling to and remain with him by faith, no matter what. Thus, whoever believes in me, says he, will then do the same works, or even greater works.

How will this happen? To be sure, this was clearly seen in the dear apostles and holy martyrs who raised many from the dead and helped others in other ways. But what are we to think about the fact that he says this not only about the apostles but about all who believe in him? And what kind of works might those be which would be greater than those of the Lord Christ? What could be called greater than making the dead alive, redeeming souls from the power of the devil and

death, and giving eternal life? Are these not his very own works, which he does in us by his divine power and might? Who could say that we would do works that are greater than these?

Here I am satisfied with the common understanding of this verse. There can be no other reason for why he calls the works done by his Christians greater than his own than that the apostles and Christians went farther with their works than he did and brought more people to Christ than Christ himself did on earth bodily. For he took on only a small corner where he preached and worked miracles during a short period of time. But the apostles and their successors have gone through the entire world for as long as Christendom has existed. In this way, Christ personally only started what had to be spread far and wide by the apostles and the preachers who have followed them until the Last Day.

Thus, it is true that the Christians do greater works than Christ, that is, more works and works done in a greater area. But the works are the very same works. For when he says: Whoever believes in me will do greater works, he does not deny that such works must be done by his power and must flow from him as the Head. Rather, he shows both here, where he says, “Whoever believes in me,” and later, “Because I go to the Father,” as well as in verse 14: “Whatever you will ask, I will do.” Accordingly, such works will be done by those who cling to him by faith, even as he exercises his power in them and demonstrates his power through them.

For here one must not separate the Head from its members, that is, Christ and his apostles and all of Christendom. Every single Christian is such a man as Christ himself was on earth and accomplishes such great things that he can rule the entire world in divine matters, help and be useful to everyone, and do the greatest works that take place on earth. For he is also esteemed more highly before God than the entire world, so that God gives to the world everything and preserves all it has for a single Christian’s sake. As a result, if there were no Christians on earth, not a single city or country would have peace. In fact, in a single day, the devil would destroy everything that is on earth. Grain grows in the fields; people are healed; people have food, peace, and protection—all this they have thanks to the Christians.

We may be poor beggars—as St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:10—yet we nonetheless make many people rich. We do not possess anything. Yet we have everything, etc. And it is also true that whatever kings, princes, lords, burghers, and peasants have in this world, they have this not on account of their fancy hair but on account of Christ and his Christians. Therefore, while there are still Christians on earth, the host must put up with the guest, just as the guest (that is, Christendom) must also pay the host while the guest stays with the host.

The history of the patriarch Jacob in Genesis 30:30 shows this. Before Jacob came to his uncle Laban, Laban was not rich. But later, when Jacob was serving him, he became wealthy. Thus, God blessed him on account of his pious Jacob, although Jacob brought nothing to Laban and received only a little from him. Accordingly, even today, lords, burghers, and peasants must have their land and people, power, honor, and possessions on account of the Christians who live among them, even if they do not recognize this and repay evil for good.

But what then are these works of the Christians, by which this happens? For one does not see anything special that the Christians do above others, especially now that the miracles have

ceased, which are the least of the works of Christians, as they happen only in a bodily way and only affect few people. But let us consider the true great works Christ talks about, which they have from God, by which they accomplish everything, which go on continuously, and which must happen daily for as long as the world is to exist.

For, in the first place, the Christians have the gospel, baptism, and the sacrament of the altar. By these means, they convert people, snatch souls from the devils, tear souls out of hell and death, and bring them to heaven. By these means, they comfort, strengthen, and preserve consciences afflicted by the devil and otherwise. By these means, they can also teach, instruct, and advise all people on how to lead a Christian and blessed life in all walks of life, etc.

These are indeed the kinds of works, which kings and emperors, the powerful and rich, the learned and wise of the world are unable to do. Nor could they pay for these works with all their possessions. For none of them is able to comfort and cheer a single conscience oppressed and saddened by a single sin. Neither could they rightly instruct a single people on how to come to Christ and on how to live before God. The opposite, however, they are very much able to do— instituting lies and idolatry against God’s Word; seducing and tearing souls from the truth by persecution, plagues, and murder. One can see this in the government of the pope and the Turks.

Therefore, where such works are done—someone is converted to Christ, strengthened in faith, and preserved in a God-pleasing life—there one may well boast that it is the kind of work that is not done by an emperor or king, but only by the power of the Lord Christ. And this work is as great as, and even greater than, raising to life those whose bodies are dead. For he himself does not consider raising to life those whose bodies are dead to be such a great work, but testifies here that he wants to do greater works by means of his Christians. For indeed, no human power, but God’s own almighty power and might must be what destroys the kingdom and might of the devil who, as Scripture says, is the lord and god of the world (John 14:30; 2 Corinthians 4:4).

Additionally, the Christians also have prayer—about which Christ himself will talk later—by which they obtain everything what they desire from God for themselves and others, even for bodily needs. Moreover, prayer is one of the highest works by which they help and preserve the world, even if they did nothing else. For instance, when a Christian prays (under a prince), and the prince wins the victory against his enemies—who then beat the enemies and obtained such victory? No one but the Christian, even though no one attributes it to him and he does not become famous and honored because of it. But God nonetheless gave the victory, not on account of the prince (if he is not a believer) but on account of the individual Christian’s prayer. This is how greatly a single pious man can benefit an entire country or kingdom—for his sake, everybody else will surely be helped.

You can read about this in Genesis 14 concerning Abraham and in Genesis 19 concerning his brother Lot—Sodom and Gomorrah were not to perish while he was still there. You can also read in 2 Kings 5 that God, by means of one individual Naman, gave fortune and victory to the entire kingdom of Syria, although it was idolatrous. Likewise, according to Genesis 41, the entire land of Egypt was helped by Joseph. In the same way, Daniel helped the kingdom in the land of the Persians. Likewise, the individual prophet Isaiah killed the army of the emperor of Assyria by his

prayer (Isaiah 37:1-7). In the same way, the Romans, Persians, and others frequently obtained great fortune and victory in war on account of the Christians alone.

In sum, it is not because of the kings, lords, and princes themselves—or some other human on earth—that they are in charge, that they enjoy peace or obedient subjects. They enjoy all this because of the Christians, although they might think: I bear the crown and use the sword; this is why everything turns out my way. For, even according to reason, it would be impossible for a single man to rule and keep in obedience an entire kingdom—where there are many different minds—or for a single mayor govern an entire city, unless there is a different kind of help and protection around him. What can a mayor do against a big mob? Or what is the one person of the prince of a land among, and even alongside, so many evil men and dishonest people, who are both at court and in cities and palaces, who take money from him and would be happy to help to betray him, unless God himself preserved his divine order and unless the Christians were there to pray? But as little as princes and mayors know that their rule is God's order and work that is not preserved by the hands of men, so they also do not know that God looks only to the prayer of the pious Christians and lets the rulers be and remain in charge on account of the Christians. This is why the rulers gives thanks for this benefit by persecuting both God's Word and his Christians.

Nonetheless, however, reason does understand and must testify that—considered in a natural way—it is impossible that so many minds allow themselves to be captive under a single head. For one daily sees and experiences more than enough that the common rabble among the burghers, peasants, and nobility does not like to be subject willingly, but would rather be free of obedience and coercion. This is why a different power must be behind the rulers which keeps kings and lords in charge and the mob—no matter how evil and disobedient it may be—nonetheless remains subject to them. Otherwise, everything soon would go to pieces.

This happens when God becomes angry, and when the malice of the tyrants and of the people—coupled with ingratitude and persecution of his Word and of the Christians—becomes so powerful that the Christians leave and no longer pray. Then malice will come to its head at last. Then God also closes his eyes and lets things go the way they go. Then prince, mayor, and the mob all collapse, just as an old house collapses, so that one may see how the world can govern itself and how well things go, when God withdraws his hand and the Christians do not pray. Meanwhile, the world does its thing, neither knowing nor recognizing these things. For the world is blind and possessed by the devil.

But we as Christians should know that the entire government and existence of the body stands and remains for as long as it is to remain only because of God's ordering or command and because of the prayer of the Christians. God's ordering and the Christians' praying—these are the two pillars that bear the entire world. When these go away, everything must collapse, as will be seen on the Last Day. Even now one can already see that kingdoms and governments are weakened and almost begin to fall, because the two pillars will soon sink and break. For the world does not want it any other way because it does not want to put up with God's Word (although the latter preserves and honors the former) but persecutes and kills the innocent Christians and does not cease to rage against the very pillars that carry the world. It is as if the world, like a mad homeowner, wanted to tear down its own house. Well, we remain steadfast for

as long as we can, even though we are not thanked for it. But once the collapse starts when God's Word and the prayer of the Christians cease, then may the world's god, the devil, have mercy on the world!

I say this so that you may understand this verse all the better—how the greatest works in the world are ceaselessly being done by the Christians, although these works seem insignificant and are not recognized. These works are done both in the spiritual and in the bodily life and government. These works include the destruction of the devil's kingdom; redemption of souls; conversion of hearts; victory and preservation of peace in lands and among the people; help, protection, and deliverance in all manner of plagues and needs. All this (says Christ) is to take place by the Christians because they believe in Christ and because everything flows from him as the Head. Indeed, this applies to each Christian individually, so that Christ may well say: Each Christian who is baptized today does the works I do.

This is why the Christians are nothing but helpers and saviors, even lords and gods of the world, as even God says to Moses in Exodus 7:1: "I have set you as a god over Pharaoh," etc. This is also why Psalm 8 says in verse 6: "You have placed all things under his feet," namely emperors, kings, princes, power, honor, and possessions, even the cattle on the pasture, oxen, sheep, wild animals, birds in the sky, and fish in the water. He does not want this to be forgotten, to indicate that whatever the world has and is able to do, this it has as a fief<sup>38</sup> from the beggars, as St. Paul talks about it in 2 Corinthians 6:10: "Those who own nothing and yet have everything." And everything that God gives to the world, God gives on account of the Christians, so that everything is called the works and miracles of the Christians which they urge and do until the Last Day. When they will cease their works, God will make an end to the world and burn everything by fire.

Until then, the Christians are the legs that bear the whole world. The world rewards them by despising them, oppressing them, having them walk in manure and excrement, putting them to shame, blaspheming them, condemning them, even driving them out of the world. We see that peasants, burghers, and lords kick their pastors and preachers and begrudge them even a morsel of bread. Some even tear their heads off. This is the kind of unwillingness and stench we have to put up with from them, being the members who have to carry this stinking belly! But on that Day they will have to look at us very differently, realizing that not they, but each Christian was an emperor and lord over all the lords of the world, not on account of his own person according to which he is a man like everybody else, but because he believed in the Lord Christ, as he says here.

Well, the world is not supposed to believe this. This is also not preached for the sake of the world. For the world is not worthy of recognizing this; otherwise, it would be too blessed. But this is said to us, as both a teaching and comfort, so that we should not think lowly of our fellow Christians—as other people do—but consider how greatly and gloriously they are praised by Christ and esteemed by God. The world only gapes at what seems high and great, what is rich

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<sup>38</sup> In feudal economies, a fief (from the Latin word *feudum*) is a grant of property from the ultimate owner of the property (e.g., a liege lord) to a tenant (e.g., a vassal) for the tenant's use during the tenant's lifetime, in exchange for service and fealty to the owner of the property.

and powerful, what walks about in glorious life and splendor. But it cannot see where all this comes from.

But if you are baptized, says Christ, and believe in me, then you are the person who has, and is able to do, much more and greater things. In fact, you are the person who can do the works I do now, and even greater ones! For I want to turn you who believe in me into such lords that your works will be worth more and accomplish more than those of any king or lord on earth. You will do and accomplish what you will and help me both to govern spiritually over souls unto salvation and to govern bodily to bring about and preserve by your prayer everything that is on earth. In this way, they must take and have everything from you, thereby unwittingly benefitting from you, so that they—like the pigs in their pen—are fed and fattened until the Last Day when they will be slaughtered. Then the devil will turn them into his roast and devour them, just as they now devour you.

See, this a great honor and glory of the Christians. We may take comfort and joy in it against the devil and the world. What would I take in exchange for knowing for certain that I could save a person from physical death? But what is this in comparison to being required to, and being able to, comfort and save hearts and consciences—and pull them out of the devil’s throat—through Christ? And what about being able to help all people by my prayer? By comparison, I should regard and despise as excrement all the world’s gold and silver, power and honor, even if it were all piled up before me.

Now, this is certain and true because Christ, God’s Son, says so. Otherwise, one would not believe it because it would be just words. But if it were gold and silver, something that sparkles in the world and looks great, everybody would come running and consider it to be something amazing.

But those who would be Christians could defiantly say: Bring it on, dear world! You be rich and count your money. I, as a Christian, may not have anything on earth. Nonetheless, you have from me, or by my prayer, whatever you have. For my Christ is your liege lord,<sup>39</sup> without whom you are unable to have anything. And even though I am a beggar before you, I have such a lofty treasure, compared to which all your possessions are not worth a penny, because I can help everyone to know where to go in death and in all other needs, to have enough eternally. You will never do this with all your possessions, crowns, and splendor.

Where, then, are those who are able to believe and boast about this? Still, we are told this, so that we may begin to learn what we have from Christ and should expect from him. In this way, we should consider being a Christian as something more exalted and glorious than the world considers its own thing to be. For he does not say: If you believe in me, you will have a great treasure of gold and silver, will conquer and possess cities, palaces, lands, and kingdoms—for these would be of no help to the Christians. Rather, he says that we should have power over sin, death, and the devil. Just as he says to the apostles in Luke 10:19: “See, I have given you power to tread on snakes and scorpions, and on all the power of the enemy, and you will not be

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<sup>39</sup> In feudal economies, a liege lord is the owner of property given out as a fief to a tenant (e.g., a vassal) for the tenant’s use during the tenant’s lifetime, in exchange for service and fealty to the liege lord.

harmed.” For I have put the Word in your mouth, which is my Word, and given you baptism, which is my baptism, and will demonstrate my almighty power through these means.

Thus, because we have such a treasure, we have all things and are lords over all lords. We are beggars on earth, just as Christ himself was. But God has poured out over us all possessions, so that the world is miserable and naked by comparison, unable to retain its possessions without us. When I die, however, I will have the kind of possessions that will stay with me. For I have the Lord Christ himself who is seated in heaven above. But you, world, must then die naked and bare and not take a single thread along. And in the life to come, you will also be robbed of all possessions, even if you were a mighty king who owned everything in this world. But not the tiniest bit of a Christian’s possessions is to be left behind. For he already has his treasure in heaven above, in and with Christ, as St. Paul says in Ephesians 2:6, that we have already “been seated in the heavenly life.” To be sure, now this is not yet revealed. But on the Last Day, the whole world will have to see what riches and eternal glory poor Lazarus will have who, outside the rich man’s door, did not have a morsel of bread falling off the table. Meanwhile, the rich belly, along with the unbelieving world, will lie and burn in eternal fire. Luke 16:23-24.

What, then, is the reason why the Christians are to do such great works, or even greater works than he himself? None other than this one: “Because I go to the Father.” How does this make sense? Is the man drunk, or does he speak in a dream? But this is the reason for what I said earlier—we do not do such great works by ourselves. He wants to say, therefore, the fact that Christendom does such great works throughout the whole world—the very works he did on earth only among a small people—is because I go to the Father and assume my kingdom. That is to say, by my suffering, death, and rising, I overcome the devil, death, flesh and blood, world, and everything in it and sit at the Father’s right hand, so that I may powerfully rule and make all things subject to me, being now able to say to death, sin, devil, world, and all evil things: Now lie prostrate before me. Now no longer be death, sin, devil, and evil world the way you were before.

This is what Christ calls “going to the Father”: He is exalted to be the Lord, is seated on the throne to the right hand of the Father, and all power and might in heaven and on earth is attributed and given to him, as he says in Matthew 28:18. This will bring it about. From there you will receive the power to do such works, because you are my members and believe in me, so that you will be in me, and I will be in you. For by the power that I will have at the right hand of the Father, in equal divine majesty, and openly glorified as true God and Lord of all creatures, I will work in you who believe in me, who have my Word, baptism, and sacrament of the altar, and remain with the same. And as I am the Lord over sin, death, hell, devil, world, and all things, so you shall also be, so that you may boast in this power—not that you have it out of your own worthiness or your own power, but only because I go to the Father.

And this is the very purpose, says he, that I go to the Father—to begin and accomplish this. For now I am weak because I still walk about down here on earth in this flesh and only do small and insignificant works, such as raising some from death or helping a handful of Jews. And now I must let myself be crucified and killed. But then, once I have been crucified, died, and been buried, I will first leap out of death into life, from the cross and the tomb into eternal glory and

divine majesty and power. Then I will also—as he says elsewhere (John 12:32)—draw all things to me, so that all creatures must be subject to me, so that I can say to you apostles and Christians: You, Peter or Paul, go and overthrow the Roman Empire if it does not want to receive my Word and be obedient to me.

This is how people will see that you will do much greater works than I do now. For I have not yet properly assumed my government and have not yet attacked a kingdom or principality, not even among my Jews. Rather, I allow them to overthrow and execute me. But afterwards, I will make a noise among them and throw them before you, so that you may deal with them as one does with old playing cards. But not by the sword or bodily coercion, but by the Word and prayer, by which I will be powerful in you and make such a push that they will either have to accept your gospel or go to pieces over it. As a result, everything that stands will stand by you, just as everything will fall unless you uphold it. In this way, they may not live the way they want to, but must live by your grace without their thanks.

*The Power of Christ's Going to the Father: Prayers in Christ's Name Are Answered*

*And whatever you will ask in my name, I will do it,  
so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.  
Whatever you will ask in my name, I will do.*

John 14:13-14.

This is part of the comfort. For here he shows the power his going to the Father is to have and generate. And he again draws to himself what he has said, that they should do the same works, even works that are greater than the ones he did—namely, that all this is to take place through him, because he now comes to the place, where he can give them, and do, what they need; where they will be granted, and will have, everything they ask or desire. You will do greater works than I have done so far, he wants to say, because I go to the Father so that neither the world nor the devil will be able to do anything against you but must yield to you and let you be their lords.

And it may well be that you may still feel weakness, and that you lack something, so that it may appear as if things will go very differently than I have told you. It may also be that the devil and the world have the upper hand, as it will appear according to the experience of the flesh and according to the world's outward appearance. But do not let this terrify you or make you feel dejected. Rather, the more you feel misery and weakness, the less you should yield and cease. Instead, you should know that I will give you what you ask and need. This is why, just begin to pray confidently, and call upon me, trusting that I will give it to you. For this is exactly why I go to the Father, where I can see all your misery and weakness and where I can answer your prayer.

And by telling them to ask, he wants to show them that they do not have the power to do such great things (he calls them greater works than he himself did) from and in themselves, but that they will have weakness and all kinds of misery and need, resistance and obstacles in their office, life, and works. He will let this happen to them, lest they become proud and arrogant, relying on themselves, as if they now had it all and did not need him anymore. This is how they will remain in humility and aware of their inability, exercising all the more their faith in Christ by calling upon him and asking him. In this way, they will experience in a more certain way his power through weakness and suffering, which drive them to call and pray, as he says to Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9, as Paul then also confesses in verse 10: My strength becomes stronger by your weakness.

Additionally, he demonstrates with these and the following words what the Christians' proper office and work is, and how necessary the same is in Christendom. The prophet Zechariah says about this in chapter 12, verse 10, that Christ will pour out and give the Spirit, who is called a Spirit of grace and prayer. For these two things the Spirit is to carry out and create in all Christians: first, that their heart may be assured and certain that they have a gracious God; second, that they may also be able to help others by prayer. The first thing brings it about that they are reconciled with God and have for themselves everything they need. Once they have that, they are then also to become the gods and saviors of the world by prayer. In this way, they themselves first become God's children by the Spirit of grace. Then, as God's children, they are

to mediate between God and the neighbor, serving and helping others, so that they may also become God's children.

Because when a Christian begins to know Christ as his Lord and Savior, by whom he is redeemed from death and brought into his rule and inheritance, then his heart is entirely permeated by God (*durchgöttet*), so that he would gladly help everyone get into the same position. For he has no greater joy than in this treasure of knowing Christ. This is why he goes forth, teaches and admonishes the others, praises and confesses the same before everyone, asks and sighs that they too may come to such grace. This is a restless Spirit who is completely at rest, that is, in God's grace and peace, that he cannot be still and idle, but always struggles and strives with all his might, as he lives solely for this purpose—to bring God's glory and praise further among the people, so that others may receive such Spirit of grace as well, even helping him to pray by the same Spirit. For where the Spirit of grace is, he brings it about that we can and may, even must, begin to pray.

This is why Christ wants to say here: When you believe in me and have received the Spirit by whom the heart is assured of God's grace—he spoke about this above (John 14:9) saying, "Whoever sees me, sees the Father" etc.—it will certainly follow that you will be compelled to pray. For prayer is the true and proper work of Christians which they alone can do. For before we become Christians and believe, we also do not know what or how we are to pray. And even if an unbeliever prays most fervently, the Spirit of grace is nonetheless not present. For, by itself, the heart can only think as follows: Dear Lord, consider my way of life, how much I suffer, or consider the merit of this or that saint, the intercession of pious people, and good works, etc. There is no faith in the divine grace and mercy through Christ. As a result, this heart remains forever uncertain, so that it cannot conclude that it will certainly be heard. This heart only wants to deal with God based on its own holiness or that of other people, without Christ, as if God should humble himself before such a heart and let his grace or help be extorted by us. In this way, God would become our debtor and servant. But this prayer does not merit grace but wrath. This is not praying but mocking God.

But a true Christian prayer should and must proceed from the Spirit of grace as follows: I have lived as well as I could. I therefore ask that you would not look at my life and deeds but at your mercy and goodness, promised by Christ, and for this reason, give me what I ask for. In this way, we are to desert ourselves in true, heartfelt humility and cling to the promise of grace alone, trusting firmly that he wants to hear us, as he has commanded us to pray and has promised to hear us.

This is why he expressly adds: "in my name," to teach that no true prayer can take place without faith and that, outside of Christ, no one is able to pray a single letter that amounts to anything before God and is pleasing to him. This is true for the prayer of all Muslims, Jews, monks, and hypocrites. For they all come before God thinking that he should consider their own, or some other person's, merit and holiness and that he should praise and honor them for this reason. This is how the hypocrite prays in Luke 18:11: "I thank you, God, that I am not like other people" etc. This is as much as saying: I do not need your grace and mercy but certainly deserve it. He does not want to take anything from God but wants to give him something, so that God would have to

pay him back and be glad to get such a holy man as his friend. But in John 14:13 he rejects this offer and does not want to hear and accept anybody's prayer, unless he comes to him in Christ's name based on nothing but his grace and mercy, saying with the tax collector: "God, have mercy on me, a poor sinner." Luke 18:13.

Accordingly, learn here that we have these two things by the Lord Christ alone—grace and the hearing of prayer. By these gifts, we, first, become children of God so that we can call upon him and then also obtain for us and others what we need. Therefore, where a Christian is, there the Holy Spirit is properly present who does nothing but pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). For even though a Christian does not always use the mouth, or make words, his spiritual heart nonetheless goes on and beats—just like the arteries and the heart in the body—uttering without ceasing sighs such as these: Oh, dear Father, that your name may be hallowed, your kingdom come, your will be done among us and everybody, etc. And then, as the assaults or temptations and misery grow stronger and more intense, such sighing and asking grows stronger as well, and even becomes audible. As a result, one cannot find a Christian who does not pray, just as one cannot find a living person without pulse, which never stops, is always active, and beats constantly, even if the person is asleep or does something else so that he does not notice the pulse.

I have often stated elsewhere—and will say more later on—what more is to be said about prayer and how it is to be done. Here it is enough to see how highly and gloriously the existence of a Christian is praised: The Christians alone are the ones who are able to pray and who carry out everything they desire by prayer. And Christ here and elsewhere so kindly entices and exhorts his followers to pray, showing that he is wholeheartedly pleased by it. This is the glory and comfort of the Christians who have the grace and the Spirit so that they understand and know what God has given them in Christ. The others—even if you talk to them about it a great deal—do not understand or care about it more than if you were to play to a pig on a harp.

But what does he mean when he says: "What you will ask in my name, I will do" etc. He just said: You will do the same works, and even greater works than the ones I do. How does he now say: What you ask, I will do? Who is this "I"? I thought he should say: What you will ask the Father in my name, he will do. But he refers it to himself. This is a strange way for this man to express himself, that he can use simple words to express lofty things. For by these words he clearly communicates that he himself is true, almighty God with the Father. For when he says, "What you ask, I will do," this is the same as saying: I am God who can do, and will give, all things. Why else should Christians pray in his name? Why are the saints invoked as holy helpers—St. George for protection in war; St. Sebastian against the plague, one saint for this remedy, the other for some other remedy—without thinking that they could grant these requests?<sup>40</sup> But he now takes everything and draws it to himself, saying: Everything you ask I

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<sup>40</sup> Beginning in the late Middle Ages, a group of fourteen "holy helpers" emerged in Germany. This was a group of fourteen saints that was seen as particularly efficacious in various needs, mostly bodily afflictions. In 1520, Luther published a treatise, *Fourteen Consolations*, to offer a biblical alternative to the popular worship of the fourteen holy helpers. AE 42:123. See also, from 1537, the same year as this sermon, Luther's Smalcald Articles, specifically SA II, II, 26.

will not entrust to anyone else but I will do it myself. Accordingly, he must be the one who can help in all our needs and must be mightier than the devil, sin, death, world, and all creatures.

His is such a power that no creature—whether angel or human—has ever possessed nor will possess in all eternity. Creatures certainly can pray and have power over God based on his Word and promise, so that he gives and does what we need, just as the apostles and prophets, Elijah and Elisha, raised the dead by prayer, and just as the angels in Zechariah prayed for the people. But this is not within their control—to grant and do these things out of their own power or to save us from sin and death. But he takes all might and power of the divine majesty and combines everything what we are to ask from God. He does not say: When you ask for gold or silver or for something that other people can give you as well. Rather, everything you ask—no exceptions. Now we know what we are to ask from God—not only the beggarly things we need on earth, that is, all the needs of this temporal life, but also that we might be delivered from all present and future misery: from sin, death and the grave, that we might be made righteous, holy, free, alive, and glorious. Now, because he commands us to pray for all this—and promises to give it—it follows irrefutably that he must be true God.

*Prayer in Christ's Name Is Answered Because He and the Father Are Two Persons but One God*

*That the Father may be glorified in the Son.*

John 14:13.

He really is a strange man who talks in a way that reason and philosophy think that these are the words of a dreamer or someone who is drunk. But I or any other man on earth did not write these words. And no matter how intelligent we are, even if we studied our whole lives with all the learned men, we would not be able to write words in this way. Therefore, if they sound foolish to the ears of the smart and intelligent people, let us be fools with Christ. For those who know and have experienced what these words are capable of will certainly not think of them as foolishness, as I, praise God, have done my part to test what these words are capable of and what they give, as they have often comforted and kept me, even as they still keep me.

In the previous words, we heard how he takes up the glory and power that is God's alone by stating that he himself would give and do everything they ask for. What does it mean, then, that he now says: "That the Father may be glorified in the Son"? How does he now cast the glory from himself to the Father? Should he not justly say, according to the natural sequence of speaking: What you ask, I will do, so that I may be glorified? To whom does the glory belong more justly than to him to whom belong the deed and the work? For it is natural and just that the one who does something is praised. Now he says: I will do the work and give what you ask, but the Father is to have the glory. He shifts around the words and changes them in such a way that he mingles and includes both, the Father and himself. Just as he did not exclude the Father when he said: "what you will ask, I will do," so he does not exclude and separate himself from the glory that is to be given to the Father when he says now: "that the Father may be glorified."

But the reason he talks this way is to lay the foundation for the article that he is true God of one substance with the Father, but as a distinct person. He therefore distinguishes himself and the Father, but brings them back together and testifies that the Father is a different person in the one divine substance and that he too is a different person, but still a single eternal God, equal in works and equal in glory. To put it simply, he says: What I do, the Father does.<sup>41</sup> And the Father's glory is my glory, etc. By shifting the words around—I will do what you ask and "that the Father may be glorified"—he ties both persons together, his own and that of the Father. For by saying: I will do it, he shows that the glory justly also belongs to him. Yet he keeps silent about his glory in what follows and gives it to the Father. But if the Father is to have the glory, he must also do the same work that Christ does. And again, if the Father is to have the glory, then Christ—as the one who does the same work—must also simultaneously have the same glory with the Father.

It is therefore powerfully concluded from these words that there are two distinct persons in the divine substance—but not two or two kinds of natures, but only a single divine substance and majesty. In sum, the work that I do is the work of the Father, so that the Father is glorified in the

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<sup>41</sup> See AE 15:302, quoting the common rule, first formulated by Augustine of Hippo (354-430): "The works of the Trinity toward the outside are not divisible."

Son (because he does this) and so that there is a single glory: He who glorifies the Son on account of the works the Son does, glorifies not only the Son but also the Father in the Son.

Now, what does it mean that the Father is glorified in the Son? Nothing other than that the Father is recognized, and acknowledged, as the one who is a gracious, merciful Father who neither is angry with us nor wants to condemn us to hell. Rather, he forgives the sin and gives his grace as a gift for the sake of his Son Christ, as has been said many times. That is the true glory by which God is glorified. For out of God's grace grows true trust in the heart, so that it takes refuge in God and confidently calls upon him in all needs. This heart also thanks God for his grace and benefits, confesses and makes known God's name and Word before everyone. These are the true acts of worship that please God and by which he is praised. But this worship can take place only "in the Son," as he says, that is, where Christ is recognized and believed, as has been said. In this way, we learn to see God through him (John 14:9) and recognize his grace and fatherly heart and know that, whatever we ask from God in his name, it will certainly be granted and received.

*The Need for Prayer in the Adversities of the Christian Life*

*Truly, truly, I tell you, if you ask anything from the Father in my name, he will give it to you.*

John 16:23.

In the previous verses, Christ delivered a sermon and told his disciples what they should know. Now he wants to conclude this sermon. And he does so by exhorting them to prayer. For he talked to them for a long time about many great sufferings, fear, and sadness that were to happen to them in the world for his sake. He also points them to both comfort and strength against these, and even promises his help to overcome them by the Holy Spirit. But he knows how great and difficult this struggle is, and how weak their flesh and blood are by comparison, so that they cannot grasp the comfort and experience the help as very strong, but often experiences the opposite in themselves. This is why he now gives them this advice, that they should turn to prayer and begin to sigh and call to God when they experience such weakness that they lack the comfort, power, and strength needed to endure and overcome the suffering, fear, and sadness.

Now, it has often been said about prayer, both how necessary it is and how great its strength is. For it is not enough that we have the Word and know and understand everything we are to know, both the doctrine concerning faith and the doctrine concerning comfort and overcoming in all troubles. Another piece is needed, which is called action, that it may be done as doctrine and knowledge direct and guide us to do. For this is what God's wisdom (that is, God's Word), Proverbs 8:14, says: "Mine is the doctrine, mine is also the doing." If doctrine is to be right, God must reveal and give the same. And even when we have the right doctrine, and know everything one is to teach and believe and do not require anything further, the result is not yet there. Much is still needed, so that it may also be carried out according to what we preach and exhort.

This is also how it was in the life and existence of the apostles. Just consider Saints Peter, John, and Paul in the Acts of the Apostles, where they carry out their office, how they have to labor and struggle by the gospel before things worked out. For this is where the devil latches on with all his power and might and agitates against it as much as he can in order to slow and hinder the gospel's progress. Additionally, he has the advantage in us and in our own heart—a great piece of the old Adam who is by nature lazy, sluggish, and weary when it comes to this struggle, and who always pulls us back, so that it becomes difficult and hard to continue against many kinds of resistance and obstacles and fight through them. The prophet Habakkuk also talks about this in his song (Habakkuk 3:15; Psalm 69:1-2): To be sure, says he, your horses and chariots are called fortunate and are victorious, but they go through deep water and the mud of many waters.<sup>42</sup> The government of Christendom is compared to such harness and wagon, where wagon and horse often must go through deep swamps. There are always obstacles, hindrances, and stops, so that no one can get anywhere. It is nothing but eternal laborious work. Nonetheless, wagon and horse must get through and, as the prophet says (Habakkuk 3:8), be "chariots of salvation," that is, be chariots and horses that remain victorious.

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<sup>42</sup> See AE 19:146, where Luther used Psalm 69:1-2 to explain Habakkuk 3:15, noting that "[a]ll these expressions indicate excessive tribulation."

This is why Christ now says: Even when the day comes when I will see you again and you will rejoice in an eternal joy, when you no longer will need to ask anything because you will know everything what you are to know and have from me (John 16:22)—even then you will lack this: You will not be able to accomplish and carry it out as you know it should be done and as you would like to do it. Your inability is caused not only by the devil and the world but also by your own flesh. As St. Paul confesses about himself in Romans 7:18, 20, complaining: I do find in me that I would like to do it the way I know and understand what is good; I even delight and rejoice in it. But I experience a different master in my body and members, who draws me back and makes me resist the good, so that I do not want to do it. He says likewise in Galatians 5:17: “The flesh strives against the Spirit, and the Spirit strives against the flesh, lest you do what you want to do.”

St. Paul would have liked to be able to do the right thing all the time, just as we would like to have no sadness, worry, impatience, or evil thoughts but would always be able to be comforted and made glad by the gospel. We also would like to see the grace and power of the Spirit at work, making all people pious, love the gospel, and do as they are taught in the gospel. And for this purpose, we also ask, exhort, and implore with all diligence and loyalty, and do whatever we can. But it still goes the way it goes. There always is resistance and objections—the longer, the more, it seems.

What, then, are we to do, as we wade, drive, and urge through such deep mud in fear, without being able to get out of it? Here no other advice can be given (says Christ) than that you should quickly lift up your eyes and heart to heaven and begin to pray to my heavenly Father. Accordingly, once you have taught, admonished, and urged everything what your office demands but is unable to give—then you are to seek and harness help and to assist one another by crying out and calling to the Father, lifting up and pushing the wagon forward. For this is what God wants to have: You are not only to recognize that he has given you the doctrine and what you already have. You are also to seek from him what you still need and what you lack. In this way, you are to experience that nothing depends on your abilities but that everything—the beginning and the completion, the willing and the doing—is to be sought from him and must be given by him, as St. Paul says (Philippians 2:13).

But here the struggle against evil Satan first begins! He always resists Christ and tries to prevent that anybody should hear or believe the gospel or live according to it. In the same way, Satan also hinders this work, so that we do not pray gladly. In fact, he makes it difficult for us to get to prayer. For he well knows the power and might of prayer, as Christians have no defense and power against all his might that it stronger than prayer. I am not now talking about those who are not Christians, because they cannot pray, even though they are able to rumble and mumble through the psalms like geese eating their oat straw. I am talking about the Christians and believers—it will be exceedingly difficult for them to pray rightly. This is why many of the ancient fathers said that there is no work on earth as difficult as praying rightly.

For the preaching office is certainly also difficult and requires great effort and care. But it still has this advantage that, even though I might not be skilled or worthy enough, I am encouraged by the fact that I can take the Bible in my hands and tell my neighbor on God’s behalf: Dear

friend, there it is written; there you do not here my word but God's Word. It is not about me; it's about your salvation. And when I have said this, I have done my part. Let the neighbor answer if he accepts this or not etc.

But when I am to speak with God and pray by myself, there are soon thousands of obstacles before I get around to it. Here the devil can throw many reasons not to pray in my way and block and hinder every avenue to prayer, so that I lead my life and never think of prayer. Only try it, if you have not experienced this and form the intent to pray. You will certainly see how many of your own thoughts will assault you and draw you away from it, so that you cannot make a real beginning.

For instance, to talk only about the greatest and most preeminent obstacles, this is the first thing that hinders and stops us. By the inspiration of the devil, we think: Indeed, you are not fully prepared to pray yet. Wait another half an hour or another day, until you are prepared or until you have finished this or that chore first. Meanwhile, the devil is at hand and leads you away for that half an hour, until you do not think about prayer for the entire day, keeping you busy from day to day with other things. This is almost the most common obstacle. It really is a cunning trick of the devil (as he often shows to me and others). He additionally finds an advantage in our flesh and blood that it is already lazy and cold when it comes to prayer, so that we cannot pray as we would like to pray. And even if we begin to pray, we quickly drift away on unrelated, useless thoughts, losing track of our prayer because of them.

In the second place, there are naturally also thoughts like these: How can you pray to God and say the Our Father? You are too unworthy and live in sin daily. Wait until you have become more pious, have gone to confession and to the sacrament of the altar—then you will not only desire to pray and be prepared; then you will also be fervent in prayer, being able to have a firm confidence in God, so that you may say the Our Father wholeheartedly. This is the truly difficult obstacle where the heart must struggle and twist itself until it has cast off this great stone—begin to step before God and to call out to him, despite such experience of unworthiness. Let everyone try this and tell me how easy it is for you to beat such thoughts back and to say wholeheartedly: My dear Father in heaven, etc.

In the congregation and where there are many others, it is somewhat easier, as we all come together and say the Our Father together. But when we are by ourselves, and each should pray by himself, then it is not so easy. There, our heart tells us that we are unworthy. And the devil magnifies and urges these thoughts: You are a shameful person, not worthy of the dirt on which you walk—how is it that you are allowed to come before God and call him Father? This is why it is a marvelous thing and an art above all arts to pray rightly—not as far as the words or the mouth is concerned, but so that the heart may reach this firm conclusion with certainty and may step before God full of confidence and say: Our Father. For whoever can grasp just a bit of such confidence of grace, is already over the hump and has taken the first step toward prayer, after which it proceeds as it ought to.

In the third place, the devil also comes with this assault to make prayer futile for you by these thoughts: My friend, why are you praying? Do you not realize how quiet it is about you? Do you

really think that God hears and heeds your prayer? This is how the devil leads you into doubt so that you may despise and cast aside your prayer. This is how he tries to prevent you from ever experiencing what prayer is and what it is able to do. I have experienced what this can do. I have also seen it in other, especially in St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153). He was very diligent in exhorting his followers that they should not go to church to pray with such doubts, as if taking a chance on whether God may heed and hear their prayer. Indeed, you should not joke around with God by appearing before him and say: Dear Father in heaven—if you do not believe this.

Therefore, as I have said, and as Christ here testifies, it takes great effort to resist all these inspirations of the devil and our own thoughts. Here we must break our heart by force and say: You evil devil, if this is where you want to go, let the evil people follow you. If I am not prepared right this hour or day, I will be even less prepared in half an hour or in eight days. Therefore, setting this lack of preparedness aside, I will pray an Our Father in the meantime, before I become even more unprepared. You should get into the habit of falling into bed and falling asleep with the Our Father every night, and to rise every morning with the same. And when there is cause, place, and time, pray before you do something new. In this way—without even considering whether you are prepared or not—you pray before the devil catches up with you and gets you to wait. For it is better to pray now, half-prepared, than later when you are completely unprepared. Just begin to pray, against the devil and to his dismay, even though you find that it is most difficult and that you are most unprepared.

Do this also when he tempts and hinders you on account of your unworthiness, telling you to wait until you are more pious and purer. For if you do not want to begin to pray until you are worthy, you would never pray. Therefore, just start to pray in the midst of such feelings of unworthiness. Just push through and jump over worthiness and unworthiness, even if you are in the midst of sins. Indeed, even if have fallen at this hour and come out of sin, what are you to do? Should you remain without prayer, until after receiving absolution? By no means! It is much better to fall on your knees in the midst of sin and pray wholeheartedly: Ah, my dear Father, forgive me; help me out of sin—lest the devil cast you ever more deeply into sin and keep you in it forever. You must, after all, pray in the midst of death and all misfortune, and pray the stronger, the deeper you are in it. And what good would it do, if you were to wait until you feel your redemption and help? This is how the prophet Jonah had to pray and cry out in the belly of the whale, laboring under the heavy, unbearable conscience of sin, and in the midst of experiencing death and hell, as he himself confesses in Jonah, chapter 2. And David prayed his psalms—for example psalms 6, 51, and 130—while he truly experienced, and was terrified by, his sin and unworthiness.

You must do likewise against the third temptation, where the devil makes you doubt whether your prayer is heard. He does so by causing you to imagine that it is too lofty and too great a thing for you to boast against God's exalted majesty that he is your Father and you are his dear child whose prayer pleases his heart, etc. Here you, again, must confidently fight back and cast your prayer into God's Word and promise, in fact, into his own order and command, saying: Dear Lord, you know that I do not come before you of my own accord, out of arrogance, or based on my own worthiness. For if I were to look at what is in me, I could not lift up my eyes before you

and would not know how to begin to pray. Instead, I come before you based on your command and because you earnestly require that we should call upon you. You have also made a promise to us. You also sent your own Son who taught us what we are to pray, teaching us the very words we are to us. This is why I know that such prayer pleases you. And no matter how great my arrogance appears to be—the arrogance of being allowed to boast before you that I am God’s child—I must obey you, as you want to have it just this way, lest I call you a liar and add to my sins an even greater sin by despising your commandment and disbelieving your promise.

See, this is how you could beat back the devil with all his false inspirations if you establish yourself on the three foundations: God’s command and promise, and the manner and words which Christ himself taught, which the devil cannot deny or overthrow. Based on these foundations, you can confidently begin to pray, being certain that such prayer is right and does not fail. You can bet that, if you only try and begin to pray, you will like the taste of it, and prayer will warm and strengthen your heart. But the most difficult part and (as one says) the biggest mountain to overcome is to cross the threshold and get the first words over the heart in true earnestness and faith, Our Father. This is why it is best to get started quickly, saying: We must pray no matter what, the sooner, the better. May God grant my situation is whatever it may be, whether I am unprepared or unworthy, downcast, sad, or impatient, in anger or evil lust, and burdened by other thoughts.

Let this be enough as an exhortation to prayer so that we may get in the habit of praying with all eagerness and earnestness. For after the preaching of the gospel by which God speaks to us, offering to give us all his grace and possessions, it is the loftiest and noblest work for us to speak to God, and receive from him in return by prayer. It truly is also highly necessary for us, because we must do everything by prayer. It is by prayer that we keep what we have. It is by prayer that we defend what we have against the devil and the world, our enemies. And what we are to obtain, this we must seek and find in prayer. In this way, prayer is for us our comfort, strength, and salvation. Prayer is our defense and victory against all enemies.

Now we return to our text where Christ shows us the defense against these hinderances and stumbling blocks of the devil and of our flesh who want to tear us away from it. By this defense we are to resist them. “Truly, truly (says he), I tell you, if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it to you,” etc. Here you hear, first of all, the commandment, that he himself commands them to pray and also rebukes them that they previously did not pray. He repeats and urges it, using many words to show them that he is serious about prayer and demands it as the Christians’ worship and their proper work.

You do well to consider this commandment and apply it to yourself, lest you consider it to be some optional work, as if it were no sin for you not to pray, as if it were enough that other people pray. Rather, you are to know that it is commanded seriously on pain of the greatest disfavor and punishment. It is as important as the commandment not to have other gods and not to blaspheme and misuse God’s name but instead to confess and preach it, laud and praise it. Accordingly, those who do not pray should know that they are no Christians and do not belong in God’s kingdom. Now, if you believe that God’s wrath justly applies to idolaters, blasphemers, and despisers of the Word, murderers and thieves, and that horrible punishments afflict the world

because of such sins—why do you not fear God’s wrath as well when you despise this commandment and walk about securely, as if you were not obligated to pray?

In this way, then, you can, first of all, refute and beat down the devil’s temptation where he claims that you are unprepared or not worthy etc. The following argument is invalid: God’s commandment is nothing, because I am unprepared to believe, to hear God’s Word, to love the neighbor, etc. This argument is invalid because the issue here is not whether you are worthy or unworthy. Rather, the issue is that you are obligated to obey God. I am also not worthy to be baptized and be called a Christian. In fact, I am not even worthy of the daily bread I eat. Should I therefore deny my Christ or never let myself be baptized, or not eat or drink? That is why you should also say when it comes to prayer: Regardless of whether I am unworthy or unprepared to pray, should I therefore not be obedient to God? The correct approach is therefore this: God’s commandment is to be kept above all and is to tolerate no obstacle. His commandment is to find you ready, whenever it demands obedience from you.

In the second place, also consider the promise where he says: “Truly, truly, I tell you, if you will ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it to you.” Lay hold of these words and imprint them onto your heart. For here you hear that he does not only give the promise but also confirms and affirms it with a twofold oath, swearing most earnestly: Just believe me. As truly as God lives, I will not lie to you.

Let those who want to be Christians feel at least a little shame for themselves that they have heard these words and have yet never prayed wholeheartedly. Is it not an eternal shame before God and the whole world that Christ must swear such a lofty oath for us, but we still do not believe it and are not even moved to begin to pray from our whole heart? What will we say in God’s judgment or against our own conscience when we are asked: Have you ever earnestly and from an undoubting heart asked the heavenly Father that his name may be hallowed, etc.? Do you not know how earnestly I have commanded this, and that I have sworn by God that you would certainly be heard if you pray wholeheartedly? Justly we should become red for shame before ourselves (I say) and still fear God’s terrible judgment, as we despise both his commandment and his precious promise that we hear them in vain. For in God’s judgment, the following excuses of yours will not count: I did not know whether I was worthy. I did not feel willing and prepared. I had other business to take care of.

Here you say: What? Is this promise always true, as he often does not give what we have asked for? After all, he let David ask in vain for his son’s life, 2 Samuel 12. Answer: I have often said how prayer is to be ordered and stated. We should not prescribe measure, goal, manner, place, and person for God in the things we ask of him. Rather, we should commend these things to him, as he knows how he should give and what is useful to us. This is why he himself set up the order and formulated three goals in the Our Father which must always have precedence, namely, the hallowing of his name, his kingdom, and his will. Secondary are our daily bread, deliverance from temptation and all evil, etc. The best part of prayer must be called: Your name, your kingdom, etc. If these lead the way, then what concerns us will certainly follow.

This is why St. John says in 1 John 5:14: “This is the joy we have toward him that he hears us if we ask according to his will.” And St. Paul says in Romans 8:26: “We do not know what we are to pray, as it is fitting. But the Spirit intercedes for us according to what pleases God.” Now, it certainly is his will what he says in his Word (as in the Ten Commandments and the Our Father), such as, that he wants to deliver you from all evil and not let you remain in temptation, and that he wants to give you your daily bread, etc. Otherwise, he would not have told you to pray for these things. This is why the four last petitions (they have to do with the temporal needs of our body) are also part of his will. But the three petitions that properly pertain to him have precedence. In this way, you have his whole and complete will, so that he certainly does not have any other intentions in his heart than what the Our Father shows you. And if you pray so that it goes according to this will of his, your prayer is certainly heard. But you must pray in such a way that you do not break or twist this order or pass over the preeminent parts.

Therefore, when you see that your request is not heard and granted, it is certainly true what St. Paul says: You do not know what you ask and how it is fitting to ask, etc. For this art is too lofty for us, says he, that we should figure out and enunciate what serves to hallow his name, to promote his kingdom, and to fulfill his will. The same is true when it comes to your daily bread and meeting your other needs, taking away sin and temptation, and deliverance from hardships, etc. It certainly is written what and how we are to ask, but time, person, manner, and measure—how he is to give these things—that is something we cannot point to or hit upon.

Therefore, if you find yourself in need and danger (for yourself or others), you should definitely pray for deliverance and help, but do so in the way the Our Father teaches you, that is, if it serves to hallow his name and pleases his will. If not, pray that he may do what he knows and deems best. This is how you pray rightly: Dear Father, give us daily bread, good weather, health, protect us from plague, war, famine, etc. But if you want to test me for a while and not right away grant these things, let your will be done. Deliver me from evil if the time is right. If not, give me strength and patience, etc.

Thus, because it is above and outside of our knowledge when or how he should help us and grant us our request, we should commend this to him. Nonetheless, we should pray and not stop or doubt whether we are heard. For whatever happens is for our best (Romans 8:28). Whether he delays or does not give us exactly what we asked for, our prayer still pleases him, so that he will give us instead something that is better than what we understand. In this way, we are to learn to know his will and to obey it; we are to increase in faith; we are to be strengthened; and we are to overcome in patience, etc.

Just as a pious father interacts with his child, when he does not give the child what it has asked for—but he does so for the child’s improvement, so that the child might learn to know the father’s heart and will, and to obey him. God likewise lets us experience his angry rod and punishment. They are the reason why we cry out to him, but he does not quickly take these away. Instead, they serve the purpose of making us more pious. Afterwards, he will give us all the more graces and good things. And he delights in our cries and sighs, as they are signs of pious children who are getting better and who do not run away from him but want to remain his children.

This is said about the situation where our request is either not granted at all or not right away. By contrast, however, we also see that, when the need is great and there can be no delay, he does not remain far away with granting the request and helping, as Psalm 9 9: “He helps in times of trouble.” In this way, everything depends on praying and crying out in complete, firm confidence and to commend it to his counsel and divine wisdom when, how, where, and by whom he should help—and we should not doubt that he will help us, even if we do not understand how we are to be helped.

The third part in this verse is where he says, “in my name.” This is the main part and the foundation on which prayer is to stand and rest. It is what gives the prayer its excellence and dignity so that it pleases God. It is what gives prayer its power and strength so that it must be heard. By this, we are freed from all severe temptations and useless worries concerning our worthiness, which hinder our prayer and make us shy away from it most. Put differently, we are not to question and worry about our worthiness. Instead, we are to disregard both worthiness and unworthiness and base our prayer on him and ask in his name.

What is the point of pursuing your own thoughts to torture yourself permanently about your worthiness? What is the point of giving in to disputations about your worthiness with the devil? What is the point of making excuses and shying away from praying because you feel you are cold and unprepared to pray? Here you hear that you are not to base your prayer on yourself, or pray in your own name or in the name of some other human being, no matter how holy, worthy, and full of the Spirit that person may be. Rather, Christ wants you to pray in his name. This is how he exhorts and—by means of the commandment and promise—entices you to pray.

It is as if he said: My friend, let it be about you however it may be. If you cannot pray based on yourself and in your name (as you also should not do), pray in my name. If you are not worthy and holy enough, let me be worthy and holy enough. Just come based on me and in my name, saying: Dear Lord, I should and want to pray following your commandment and promise. If I cannot do it well, and if it is worthless or invalid when I do it in my name, let it be valid and good in the name of my Lord Christ. Do not have any doubts that such prayer is pleasing to God and will certainly be heard by him, as certainly as the name of Christ, his own dear Son, pleases him. Everything he asks must be Yes and granted.

This is how the words “in my name” require faith when praying, so that we know that our own worthiness neither advances our prayer nor obtains that our prayer is heard. For the same reason, our unworthiness is not to stand in the way of our prayer. Put differently, we are to know by faith that we are certainly heard only for the sake of Christ, our one Mediator and High Priest before God. In this way, we are to base our prayer completely on him. This is what all of Christendom does when it concludes and seals all its requests and invocations by these words: “through Jesus Christ, our Lord,” thereby offering them up to God in faith.

You should therefore do likewise, in order to fend off the miserable thoughts that hinder and deter you from praying. In this way, the devil will not deceive you when he tries to suggest to you that you are not worthy. When you feel that you are not worthy and that you cannot become worthy, you should all the more fall on your knees and latch on to Christ and cast your prayer

onto him. This is how you bring your prayer before God, so that he would accept and hear it for Christ's sake. Do not say such prayer in doubt or uncertainty, but certainly believe that your prayer did come before God, hit the spot, and is already Yes, because it was done based on the name of Christ, and concluded with the Amen, so that he may here confirm his Word.

For this would be one of the greatest blasphemies—because it accuses God of lying in his Word—if you were to pray based on his commandment and promise as well as in his name, and yet were to waver like this: Who know if it was prayed well and heard? A Christian should never allow this thought into his heart! “If you want to serve God” or pray, says Jesus Sirach, Chapter 18:23, “beware lest you tempt God,” but pray in a way that you are certain that God hears it. Otherwise, it is not praying to God but mocking and blaspheming him. This is how the entire rabble of the pope, priests, and monks used to do it, and still do it, who ceaselessly blabber, sing, and chant by day and night, and call this blabbering prayer. But none of them ever thought of faith. I have prayed, they say, but I commend it to God whether he wants to hear it. By saying this, they confess that they believe nothing. Of course, their prayer remains unheard. In fact, it is nothing but sin and blasphemy, as Psalm 109:7 says. For what should God care about a prayer you say in doubt and unbelief, by which you, by your own words, turn yourself into a liar and additionally accuse God of lying?

A Christian, however, must know that his prayer is heard, and must know this as certainly as he thinks and believes that God is truthful. For although he is unworthy, he has not prayed based on his own name and does not want to be heard for his own sake but in Christ's name and for the sake of Christ's worthiness. A Christian must doubt this as little as he should doubt the Word of God he preaches or hears, or baptism, the sacrament of the altar, absolution, the Ten Commandments, or his calling in life. Otherwise—if he were to consider his unworthiness—he would ultimately have to doubt that he is God's creature. And by having these doubts, he would deny God himself, and it would be better if he knew nothing of any of these things.

But as he now must maintain his faith against these doubts, and may not doubt that he was baptized, has heard the gospel, has received (or is yet to receive) the sacrament of the altar—much less must he doubt whether he should obey God's commandment and whether his obedience in his vocation according to the Ten Commandment is right. Rather, he is to believe and say as follows: I know that I have God's Word and am in the vocation where I am to be obedient to God. But even if I do not believe strongly enough, or do not do or live the way I should, that does not take away from the Word. The same is true when it comes to prayer: Even if I am not worthy for my prayer to be heard, Christ—in whose name I make such prayer—certainly is worthy. For his sake, my unworthy and unprepared prayer must also be pleasing and worthy before God. This is why St. Bernard was a fine man and had Christian thoughts that he faithfully admonished his brothers that they, when they wanted to pray, should not doubt it after saying it. For I tell you, says he, as soon as we begin to pray, our words are already counted and recorded in heaven.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, In Quadragesima Sermo V, De triplici modo orationis 5 (Migne Patrologia Latina 183:180A). Luther frequently referred to Berhard's admonition regarding prayer. E.g., AE 3:291; AE 29:218; AE 30:323; AE 44:48.

*Praying in Christ's Name and the Complete Joy of the Christians in Heaven*

*Until now you have not asked anything in my name;  
ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be  
complete.*

John 16:24

What? Have they not prayed before? To be sure, from the beginning, he often told and exhorted them how they should pray. He also gave them the manner and words, as they asked him to teach them to pray (Luke 11), as John the Baptist and the Pharisees also taught their disciples. But why is it that he now says that they previously did not pray in his name, accusing them as if they had been idle before and had not taken on prayer at all? But we have heard that he here talks about the kind of prayer that is prayed in his name. For he wants to establish thereby a difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament, between his forerunners and his coming or his present government. To be sure, the dear fathers and prophets also prayed in the true Spirit and faith, but their faith was only in the Christ who was to come. But now prayer is no longer to be based on him as the Christ who was to come, but in the name of him who has come, who has fulfilled Scripture, and who now rules in power.

Such prayer is now pleasing (he wants to say) after his suffering and ascension, when the gospel concerning me is to be revealed and proclaimed to the whole world—the gospel that I have come and carried out everything that was prophesied concerning me: I paid off sin, killed death, destroyed hell, and unlocked heaven. By such preaching I now institute a new worship in which all distinctions in external manner, place, gestures, etc. are abrogated, as everything is now drawn to me and directed toward me. As a result, no other prayer and worship will henceforth be valid than what is done in faith in me, or what is prayed and done in my name—the name of the one who has now come and is now revealed by the gospel.

This is why the Jews have no excuse left after his ascension and the public preaching of the gospel. It is of no avail that they have their Moses and worship, suffer and do much, pray and serve God in the false belief of a messiah who is yet to come. For it has been publicly enough proclaimed to them and to the whole world that he has come already. Additionally, their own Scripture convicts them of this fact. Their own experience should also teach them that they hope for another messiah in vain. Their forefathers could honorably and in truth faith wait for him as the one who was to come. In this true faith, they could pray based on his coming and observe their worship of the law, because Scripture could not be fulfilled yet, as his new public preaching had not yet gone out into the world.

But now they themselves must concede that the time indicated and determined by the prophets has long since expired; that, additionally, the gospel concerning the same Christ—promised by the prophets—has sounded forth in the world; and that the very same Messiah has since been accepted by all the gentiles. Meanwhile, they themselves deny and blaspheme this Christ (although he is their blood and flesh) out of persistent unbelief and hatred against him. As a result, God must be a liar for them in his Word and fulfillment. It is therefore only just that they

will finally be cast out with all their faith and worship,<sup>44</sup> so that they will not obtain a savior in eternity, unless they convert to this one. Whatever they pray in their messiah's name is lost, condemned, and utter abomination before God. And it must be fulfilled in them what Psalm 109:7 prophesied: "His prayer would have to become sin," by which they do nothing but make God angrier and their condemnation more severe.

This is why he now says: You have not yet said your prayer in my name, as you should, because you are not yet in the knowledge and faith of my suffering and resurrection by which I am to fulfill all things. But when this will take place and when it will be preached, then a new prayer and worship will go forth into the whole world, so that people will rightly pray in my name. Then this prayer and worship will also demonstrate its power and fruit, so that people will see that such prayer will be heard and fulfilled mightily.

Thus, the worship and prayer of the Jews is condemned and lost because they direct it at God, not in the name of this Christ (as the Christ who has come) but in the name of one who is yet to come. What, then, will God say about the kind of prayer that is said so much and so frequently in the whole papacy and in Islam? Their prayer is said without any Christ—without the one who is to come and without the present one—but they come before God without any mediator, in their own name. They do this thinking that, once they have done and prayed so much, God should consider it and hear it because of such works and merits. They think not even once that they need this Christ for prayer (even if they mention him) but base and build their prayer on their own work, as if they were the kind of people that God would have to consider. They are justly told: What are you doing with your prayer and worship? After all, you have never prayed in my name. In fact, you have never prayed a single word (at least what is called true prayer before God). That is why your prayer is lost labor, even sin and blasphemy against God.

In this way, everything that is to be called praying and serving God in a way that is right and pleases him is comprehended in this one word, "in my name." This is separated from all other worship, even (as I have said) from that of the Old Testament observed by the holy fathers. Everything becomes new in this Christ, including the prayer of the same dear fathers, because they called upon the same Christ who has now come, having fulfilled that which they believed and hoped for. And now Scripture and the psalms sound just as new in our mouth as when David first sang them—if we believe in Christ. In short, Christ henceforth wishes to have abrogated all diversity and difference in prayer and worship. He wishes to have brought everything into unity, so that now there is nothing but what St. Paul says: one God, one church, one faith (Ephesians 4:4-6), one prayer and worship, a single Christ, yesterday and today, and in eternity etc. (Hebrews 13:8). Put simply, God does not want to hear or know anything besides that which proceeds in Christ's name.

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<sup>44</sup> See AE 22:78 where Luther paraphrases Deuteronomy 18:19 as "Whoever does not give heed to him shall be cast out from my people forever," to conclude on this basis "This the Jews experienced to their great sorrow. [Christ] comes to them and raps at their door; but He finds no welcome and no admittance among them."

*Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.*  
John 16:24.

Here is the commandment. He does not only wish to exhort and strengthen us when it comes to prayer. He also wishes to impose the commandment on us and demand from us that we should pray in obedience to God. And as that promise and assurance is to make us desirous and willing to pray, so this command is to coerce and urge us—there should and must be prayer, if I want to love and obey Christ, no matter how unworthy I may be, as has sufficiently been discussed above. But he also repeats the promise: Just pray confidently; there will be no lack of hearing; for you will certainly receive. What more is he now to do? Or what greater exhortation and incentive could there be?

But what does he mean when he concludes, saying “that your joy may be complete”? Why is it that he here orders and directs our prayer toward joy, as if nothing more than complete joy is to be sought in prayer? After all, in the Our Father, he teaches that we should, first of all, pray for the hallowing of his name and the strengthening of his kingdom. How, then, does he start talking about the completion of our joy at the very end? As the lofty spirits say, even if heaven were open for you, you should not wish to enter it, unless it is God’s will. For we are to pray for nothing but what God wills. The simple answer is this: He here talks to his Christians (for everybody else should not and cannot pray), who desire nothing more than God’s name, kingdom, and will—and who have no greater joy than when these things take place. But all this is said against those who pray falsely, who turn this upside down by seeking only their own advantage and by wanting to be and obtain everything before God. And while they have the name of Christ, they have no heart, love, and desire for Christ and his kingdom. This is a false request and a false love.

Theologians have also talked about this in the past. Having seen this from a distance, they distinguished two kinds of love—love as concupiscence (*amor concupiscentiae*) and love as friendship (*amor amicitiae*). St. Augustine calls these: using (*uti*) and enjoying (*frui*) God. Some, says St. Augustine, love God out of goodwill. Others love him for the sake of their own advantage. This is love as concupiscence or, to put it bluntly, a whore’s love that loves another person out of wickedness. But that other love, love as friendship, is an honest kind of love, as true marital love or the natural love between parents and children, where one wishes the other the best and where one delights and rejoices when the other is well.

Accordingly, there are also two kinds of lovers here: Some only seek to avoid punishment and pain; they do not care about God’s name and kingdom. That is the love of an evildoer, like a thief, who loves the judge and hangman only because he is afraid of the gallows, as the proverb says: He who is afraid of hell will enter it. These do not know anything about the joy Christ talks about here.

But the Christians (he talks about them here), who love Christ from a true heart, have this mind: There is nothing they desire or seek more than that God’s kingdom is promoted, that his name and glory are made known and are praised, and that his will is done by everyone. And when this happens, they are certainly helped. And so that these primary things may happen, they also pray

for daily bread and all other needs on earth. Therefore, only pray confidently, says he, then you will richly experience such joy, as your heart desires. And along with it, everything that is useful and good for you will be given to you. For where this order is observed that you seek first the kingdom of God (as he says in Matthew 6:33), so that his Word is preached and believed, then everything else will be right: We may then also pray for temporal goods, so that he may feed us and help us in every need.

But his words—“that your joy may be complete”—properly refer to what he said before (John 16:20) about the sadness and suffering the Christians would experience in this world. That verse refers not only to the short time when he would be taken from them and they would be stuck by themselves in fear and sadness without help and comfort, abandoned by the whole world, overwhelmed by heavy, sin-burdened consciences. The verse also refers to the time when they, after his resurrection, would be persecuted and condemned by the world due to their preaching office, when they would be harassed and tortured by the devil. During all this time, what he said would apply to them: “You will weep and cry, but the world will rejoice,” etc.

And although he promised them that they would rejoice again, and that no one would take their joy from them (John 16:22), he is well aware that such joy would be completed only weakly and be mingled with sadness, so that they would feel their sadness much more strongly than their joy. This is why he tells them to pray and ask, so that their joy would grow stronger and stronger. For if they quickly experienced their joy in its completion, and felt no more sadness, they would no longer need prayer. But now things in this life must be salted, so that fear and sadness drive them to ask and to call, so that comfort may taste all the better, and so that they may crave joy all the more. This is why he promises that their joy will be complete, so that they may overcome and forget all fear, sadness, and sorrow. But to make this come true, he directs them to prayer, so that they may obtain and receive this joy.

And, as I said, this completeness of joy is primarily directed toward these lofty matters concerning God’s name and kingdom, which must proceed for there to be joy. Otherwise, you as a Christian will never have joy in your heart. For this is the greatest part of the sorrow and sadness Christians experience: They must see that God’s name revealed in his gospel is shamefully desecrated and blasphemed everywhere; that God’s kingdom is persecuted; and that his will is despised and trampled underfoot. And they must even feel these things in themselves, as the devil fights against God’s name, kingdom, and will in their own hearts with his hellish thoughts of unbelief, blasphemy, despair, etc. Additionally, their own flesh resists the Spirit of this joy. This is their true hell, torture, and sorrowful pain. Without this experience in them, they could easily bear and overcome all persecutions, suffering, and torture. They could even accept these with joy, as did the dear holy martyrs.

What are we to do, then? This joy cannot be complete (as Christ here says), until we see that Christ’s name is completely hallowed; that all false doctrine and heresies are rooted out; that all tyrants and persecutors of his kingdom are suppressed; also that the will and plans of all the godless and of the devil are fended off; that God’s will alone proceeds; also that we are no longer tempted by the cares of the belly or hunger and thirst; that no sin oppresses us; that no temptation weakens the heart; and that no death holds us captive. But all these things will not come to pass

until the life to come. Then we will experience nothing but complete joy and not a bit of sadness, etc.

But in this life, it goes as St. Paul says (1 Corinthians 13:9), “in part.” We only have a droplet of this joy in faith, which is the beginning or foretaste and anticipation, as faith lays hold of the comfort that Christ has redeemed us and that we have come into God’s kingdom by him, etc. But the strength and results of this proceed only weakly, as they cannot be so pure in faith and life. For we fall into dung time and again, as we are burdened by sadness and heavy consciences, so that our joy cannot be pure. In fact, it becomes so small that we can barely feel even such beginning joy.

This is why this piece must be added, which is called praying for help and strength, so that our joy may one day be complete and pure. You must not look for this joy in you or in this world, because the joy you find there is impure. And death takes it all away in the end. Rather, you must look for this joy (says Christ) by praying in my name, so that God’s name, kingdom, and will may prevail everywhere and so that the ceaseless urgings and resistance of the devil, the world, and the flesh against God’s name, kingdom, and will would finally come to an end. For this I have come; and for this I have called and established you.

See, this is what he means here by these words when he says that your joy will be complete. He testifies by these words that they are to have joy in him (as he says later at the end), but in such a way that they will always need prayer that such joy may remain with them and become ever stronger, even complete. For it is not as if the person who has tasted the firstfruits and refreshment of this joy will soon grow tired and full of it. Rather, the more that person has tasted of this joy’s comfort and sweetness, the more he will grow hungry and thirsty for it. For they must also put up with the devil who mixes vinegar and gall into their joy, so that they will become filled more with bitterness and sadness than joy (of which they have tasted just a bit). This is why he exhorts them to keep praying confidently for this joy to be completed, as it will forever be after this life.