

The General Prayer in the Divine Service

The General Prayer

Romans 8:26-27 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

1 Timothy 2:1-4 Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. 3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Other Passages

Acts 2:42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Matthew 18:19 "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.

LUTHER was noted for his life of prayer, and his extempore pleadings with God were noted for their fervor. Yet the Reformer always returned to his beloved Lord's Prayer. So he remarked at Christmas time in 1532, when prayer was the subject of discussion at his table. (From the notes of Veit Dietrich.)

2458 Luther's Love of the Lord's Prayer The Lord's Prayer is my prayer. This I pray; and at times I add a bit from the Psalms. . . . Nothing is like the Lord's Prayer. I pray it in preference to any psalm.⁴ (W-T 1, No. 421)

ONE OF Lauterbach's collections (one that draws on several years) records a somewhat similar remark made by Luther.

2459 The Prince of Prayers *Oratio Dominica*, the Lord's Prayer (*das Vater Unser*), *est oratio orationum*, is a prayer above all prayers, the greatest of all prayers, which has been taught by the greatest Master of all, in which all spiritual and bodily trouble is comprehended and which is the strongest consolation in all temptations, tribulations, and in the last hour. (W-T 5, No. 6288)

IN THE SAME collection of his sayings there is a reference of his to the admirable compactness of this prayer.

2460 The Precious Conciseness of This Prayer How great a wall and palisade prayer is to the church, how great a weapon the petition of the pious, no one experiences but the pious and the believer, who has the spirit of grace and prayer. Ah, what an excellent Master has composed these words of the Lord's Prayer! An inimitable command of language (*infinita rhetorica*) is found in them; it covers all matters and affairs. The first three petitions ask for such grand and heavenly blessings that no heart can ever

exhaust their meaning. The Fourth Petition presents, as in one little package, all the interests of state and home, all bodily and temporal needs. The Fifth Petition fights against the devil of a bad conscience, aware of sins. Truly, this prayer was made by a wise Man, whom no one can imitate; for the Lord has composed the Lord's Prayer for us in this compact manner and has included in it every need that may arise in all our trials; for without being tried, it is impossible truly to pray. That is why David [God through David] says: "Call upon Me in the day of trouble" (Ps. 50:15). Otherwise prayer is a cold chattering. (W-T 5, No. 6013)

MOREOVER, he who prays *this* prayer has the additional advantage of knowing that his petitions are in accordance with the will of his heavenly Father. In his Large Catechism (1529) Luther points this out in the introductory remarks to his exposition of the Lord's Prayer.

2461 He Who Prays Is on Safe Ground Here Besides this, we should be incited and drawn to prayer because, in addition to this commandment and promise, God anticipates us and Himself arranges the words and the form of prayer for us. He puts into our mouths the very manner and matter of the prayer which He wants us to offer, that we may see how heartily He is concerned about our need and may never doubt that this prayer is pleasing to Him and will certainly be answered. This is surely a great advantage the Lord's Prayer has over all other prayers which we may compose ourselves. For in them conscience might ever be in doubt and say: I have prayed, but who knows how it pleases Him or whether I have hit upon the proper proportions and manner? Therefore no nobler prayer can be found on earth than the Lord's Prayer, which we pray daily; for it has the clear testimony that God

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loves to hear. We should not surrender it for all the riches of the world. (W 30 I, 196 — E 21, 110 — SL 10, 104 f)

ESPECIALLY not since Christ has given it to us. He surely knew our every need and "through Him we have access . . . unto the Father" (Eph. 2:18).

2462 A Prayer from the Omniscient Christ for His Christians The best form of prayer is in the Lord's Prayer, which Christ Himself has prescribed to us and has bidden us to pray. If you pray this prayer, you need not worry about having omitted anything. For Christ Himself can understand it better than you and can apply it better to all the particulars of present calamities than you, even though you made long explanations. Yet it is not bad — in fact, it is of great benefit — to pray expressly for this or that. Only let us strive for a heart that is sure that our prayer will not be offered in vain, but for Christ's sake. For if Christ has prescribed the form of prayer, it follows that it pleases Him. . . . If He has promised to hear, it follows that He will hear. Therefore we should accustom ourselves to this Christian activity. It is a work which no one but a Christian is able to perform.⁵ (W 25, 390 — E op ex 23, 271 f — SL 6, 830 f)

IN 1535, while complying with the request of a friend⁶ for some directives concerning the proper procedure in prayer, Luther commended the Lord's Prayer highly but deplored its shameful abuse.

⁵ The words are part of Luther's brief exposition of Is. 65:24 in 1532. It should be unnecessary to prove that only Christians have the Christ-given privilege of praying the Lord's Prayer, for the Lord gave it to *His* disciples. Therefore although the name of Christ does not appear in it, it distinctly presupposes faith in Him as the divine Mediator. See John 14:6. Gal. 3:26, etc.

⁶ The friend was one Peter Beskendorf, a *Balhier*. See W 38, 351 on him.

2463 The Lord's Prayer, a Precious Martyr To this day I feed, as an infant, on the Pater Noster, I drink and eat of it as an adult and can never get my fill of it. Indeed, it is the very best prayer to me, better than even the Psalter, which I certainly love very dearly. In truth, it is evident that the real Master has composed and taught it; and it is a great pity that such a prayer of such a Master should be prattled and prated to pieces in all the world without any devout attention. In the course of a year many probably pray the Pater Noster thousands of times. But if they were to pray it a thousand years in *their* manner, they would not have tasted or prayed one letter or vestige of it. In short, the Pater Noster (as well as the name and Word of God) is the greatest martyr on earth; for everyone torments and misuses it, and few comfort and cheer it by using it correctly. (W 38, 364 — E 23, 223 — SL 10, 1401 f)

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See also *Means of Grace, Sacraments*

LUTHER prized the Lord's Supper highly, as his many controversies concerning this Sacrament indicate. In 1533 he had written a book in condemnation of its papal perversion in the private Mass; in the following year he wrote a letter "to a good friend,"¹ in which he again denounced the Mass while stressing his love for the real Lord's Supper.

2464 Luther's Love for the Lord's Supper I certainly love it with all my heart, the precious, blessed Supper of my Lord Jesus Christ, in which He gives me His body and blood to eat and to drink orally, with the mouth of my body, accompanied by the exceedingly sweet and gracious words: Given for you, shed for you (Matt. 26:26 ff.; Mark 14:23 f.; Luke 22:19 f.). (W 38, 267 — E 31, 385 — SL 19, 1292)

¹ See W 38, 256ff. on conjectures concerning the identity of this "good friend."