

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Please turn in the folders in your pews, in your hymn racks, to the Third Chief Part of Martin Luther's Small Catechism dealing with prayer, the Lord's Prayer, the Our Father. We will recite together the Seventh Petition which is: **But deliver us from evil.** We recite the petition and meaning together. **But deliver us from evil.** *What does this mean?* We pray in this petition, in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.

This petition has to do with every evil that may overcome us: poverty, shame, death, and in short, all the tragic misery and heartache of which there is too much to count on this earth. The devil, who is a very real and present danger in our lives, leads us into temptation and despair and every great shame and vice. The devil is a liar and a murderer, he innocently seeks our life desiring our ruin. He causes accidents and injury and pain and suffering to be in our bodies and lives. Daily he attacks us, desiring our downfall. For some, the devil causes physical pain and for others emotional pain, even driving some to insanity. The devil haunts and harasses others to commit suicide and other dreadful tragedies. Some are brought to false belief, despair and other great shame and vice, even rejecting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Therefore there is nothing for us to do on earth but to pray constantly against this arch-enemy, the devil, that he would have no power over us. For if God does not support us with His Holy Word and blessed Sacraments, as He most generously does, we would not be safe from the devil and all evil even for a single minute.

Megan, Abby, Kwinn, today, we celebrate and give thanks for your graduation from high school. Today we remember and give thanks that you are each baptized children of God, that you have confessed the one true faith as proclaimed in the Holy Bible and taught in the Small Catechism, that you eagerly and gladly receive the Lord's Supper to the strengthening our your souls. And you know what, the devil hates you for it. On the day you were baptized he drew a big target on your back and he has been gunning for you ever since. The devil hates the fact that you are here today. The devil hates the fact that you are hearing the Word of God today. The devil hates the fact that you will receive the Lord's body and blood today. The devil would like nothing more than for you to reject the faith you have been taught. The devil would like nothing more than for you to participate in evil.

Today, in recognition of your graduation you will each receive, among other things, a copy of this book, a Treasury of Daily Prayer. This book has one purpose, to guide you, as the title says, in a daily life of prayer; to strengthen and keep you throughout the week in the grace, mercy and peace of God that you received on Sunday morning. I am assuming, of course, that you will be in church regularly even when you go to college; that you hear the Word of God, that you hold it sacred and gladly hear it and learn it, that you receive the Lord's Supper regularly, ultimately, that the devil would have no power over you, that the world would not lead you astray, into every evil of body and soul. Remember, the devil lurks around like a ravenous wolf ready to devour you and destroy you. But also remember what our Lord says, "I know the plans that I have for you, plans of peace and not of evil, that you would have a future and a living hope. You will call upon Me and come to Me in pray and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."

To remind you of the plans that Jesus has for you, I went back in the church records and looked up your confirmation verses. Megan, your verse is Matthew 28:20 where Jesus says to His disciples, “Teach them to observe everything I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always unto the end of the age.” You have been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. You have been taught the one true faith as it is proclaimed in the Apostles’ Creed. You have a close and personal relationship with the one true God. He loves you, is merciful toward you and is with you always, never leaving you or forsaking you.

Abby, your confirmation verse is Psalm 119:11, where David says, “Your Word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.” God has put His Holy Word in your heart, that He would speak to you that you would be in constant conversation with Him. Your heart is like a nest into which the divine Word of God dwells as an egg, like a vault it is kept safe and secure. If your mind and your memory fail you, it is okay, the Word of God dwells in you richly because God has put it there. The Holy Bible says that the Virgin Mary, after experiencing all of the events of her Son Jesus, kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.

Kwinn, your confirmation verse is John 14:6, where Jesus says, “I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” Jesus speaks these words to Thomas and the other disciples on Maundy Thursday, in the upper room, on the night when He was betrayed. Jesus had told Peter that he would deny Him three times before the cock crowed, but Jesus said, “Let not your hearts be troubled...believe in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions and I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am there you may be also.”

Megan, Abby, Kwinn, even throughout your short lives, like all of us, you have gone astray, you have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. You have not kept God’s Word.

You have not lived as you should. You have not repented as you should. You have not feared, loved and trusted in God as you should. But at the same time, be reminded of this, Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who leads you and guides you and takes care of you, He feeds you, He keeps you away from the wolf, the devil, who desires your destruction. Remember that Jesus has set you in the path you should walk in and as you pray in the pray He gave you, “He will deliver us from evil.” And at the end of your earthly life, He will bring you to be with Him, that you would dwell in heaven forever, where there is no more pain, no more suffering, no more tears, only rejoicing with all the saints and angels and all the company of heaven, participating in the heavenly banquet that has no end.

Fellow witnesses in Christ, in the Gospel lesson for this morning Jesus said that the Holy Spirit does three things: He convicts of sin, He convicts of righteousness, and He convicts of judgment. And by convict Jesus means to convince, to teach, to exhort, to remind. The Spirit convicts us of sin because we do not believe in Jesus. He convicts us of righteousness because Jesus has gone to the Father for us and now sits at the right hand of the Father, from where He will come to judge the quick and the dead, to bring us to be where He is. And He convicts us of judgment because the devil has been judged, he has been defeated, we are victorious, we have nothing to fear. This is still the work of the Spirit today. We see Him actively present among these three graduates. The Holy Spirit guides us in the way of Jesus. He points us and joins us to the cross of Jesus where the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come were accomplished for us and promised to us. This is the message and mission of the One Holy Christian and Apostolic Church. By the Holy Spirit’s work we are righteous and blessed saints of the Most High. We are children of God, beloved of the Father. By the power of the Holy Spirit, who was given to us at our baptism, the Father is well-pleased with us. Amen.