

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today, we continue in our meditation upon Martin Luther's Small Catechism. Please turn in the folder in your pew to the third section, on the Lord's Prayer, the Our Father, and read with me the Third Petition, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We will read the petition and its meaning together.

**Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. *What does this mean?* The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also.**

***How is God's will done?* God's will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God's name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die. This is His good and gracious will.**

This Sunday is traditionally called Passion Sunday, for it is on this day that we hear of the people's rejection of Jesus as the only Messiah, and how they sought to kill Him. We drape all the crosses and statues in the church to remind us that the price for our Lord's passion is great, and so that when we next view the cross on Holy Saturday, during the Easter Vigil, it will be with new eyes. We will truly see, with eyes of faith, how beautiful, how important the cross truly is. This is contrary to the devil's wicked desire who desires that we never see the cross.

Jesus properly points out to the Jews that if they truly were from God the Father, they would truly love Him; for Jesus proceeds from the Father and goes back to the Father. Jesus is the Son of God, who has come down from heaven and will return to heaven. Jesus says that they are of their father, the devil. For the devil is the father of lies and is at the root of all sin and evil in the world. The cause of sin is the will of the devil and of men turning away from God. Jesus Christ said that when the devil lies he speaks according to his own jealous and evil desires. Remember, God and the devil are constantly at war for your body and soul.

In times of great evil and distress in the world, it is quite common to ask the question of why. Why is there so much evil in the world? Why is there so much hatred and violence? Why

doesn't God do something? But if you dig even deeper, the question may even be asked of ourselves: why do I do these things? Why am I so possessed by sin? Saint Paul himself struggled with this very same question when he wrote: "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me."

This is the slavery to sin which we all are bound under and which we all struggle with every day of our life. If you do not struggle and fight against sin, it is not a sign that you don't sin. It is a sign that you are blind to sin and do not realize its stranglehold on you. The baptismal life is a constant struggle against the devil, the world and our own sinful nature.

This is the message which so incensed and infuriated the Jews in Jesus' day. He had the audacity and sheer gall to suggest to them that they were not going to be automatically saved because they were Jews, because they had Abraham as their father. But even more, Jesus knows and understands the connection between sin and the devil. For sin and the devil always go together; and from them comes death. That is the devil's desire and will for us; that we would die eternally. Your death and my death and the death of all creation are the result of sin and the wicked and evil plans and activities of the devil; and that is why Jesus, the Spotless Lamb of God, shed His blood, dying His innocent suffering and death on the cross, that we would not die forever but live and reign with Him eternally in His kingdom. That is God our Father's holy will for us, destroying the evil plans of the devil; that we would not die but live.

Now Jesus isn't just talking about the Jews in this text finally; he's talking about you and me. He's talking about our desire to cling to pet sins. He's talking about our wanting to always hold back on God, not giving Him one hundred percent. You know what I mean. I'll go to

church and be a Christian and all, but there are just some things that are too good to give up. There are certain sins which are mine, and I'm not going to let anything or anyone tell me I can't do what I want to do. Not God, not Pastor Dietrich, no one.

This is the trial Abraham faced in the sacrifice of his son, Isaac. God had given him a son in his old age, and now God asked him to go and sacrifice his son, to prove his great love for the Lord. It didn't make sense, and Abraham was sorely tempted to simply refuse. After all, this was his son, no one could take him away. He loved Isaac like no one else in the world. And yet it is precisely that love for his son which God tested. What are you willing to give up for me, the Lord asked: your livelihood, your friends, your life, or even your son's life? Abraham walked by faith not by sight. He passed the test, not because Abraham was good, but because God gave him the faith to pass the test. So too with each one of us, our heavenly Father strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die.

But Abraham is not the only one God ever tested. Every day of our life our faith is tried and tested. There are constantly temptations for us to overcome, trials to face, and crosses to bear. But we know the dilemma; we fail at these tests every day. Like the Jews of Jesus' day, we just can't see past our own selfish nature and self-righteous judgment about the rest of the world.

So if we are sinners, where does our hope lie? The help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. Our hope lies in those great words of Jesus, "Before Abraham was, I AM." Those may sound like easy words to say, but those are words of sweet comfort for the hurting sinner. Those words draw you outside of yourself and your own failures and shortcomings, and draw you into His loving embrace and His everlasting comfort.

Let me explain. As long as you look at sin as something you can conquer like a bad habit, you will fail. We have a hard enough time conquering bad habits. Sin goes much, much deeper.

Sin is killing us. Being a Christian is not like a diet program to get rid of sin. Sin is a part of our very nature as a human being, we call it original sin. We cannot simply reform our way of life. That is putting a band-aid on a gunshot wound. We must be reborn. We must be made anew, not once but every day. No set of laws or regulations or steps for living will cure this disease. It must come from outside of us. That is how it is with Baptism, every day we die with Christ, killing the old adam within us, that the new man might emerge to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. Every day we must be born again, that the will of God would be done in us, that sin, death and the devil would have no power over us.

Before Abraham was, I AM. What this means is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has had our salvation planned before the foundation of the world. Our heavenly Father knew we would fail, and His love for us is so great, so strong and powerful, that He ordained His only-begotten Son to become flesh and die so that the price would be paid for your failure and mine. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own holy precious blood did He pay the price. It is that body and blood which you eat and drink this day. It is that body and blood which will cleanse you and remake you into the image of God once again.

It is the message of forgiveness and life through death, and salvation through suffering, that brings hope and peace to us today. This is the message of the cross. Abraham rejoiced to see this day, and he saw it and was glad. For all of heaven rejoice when one sinner comes to realize their sinfulness and turns in faith to the only one who can save them, Jesus Christ, our Lord. As we prepare for our Lord's suffering, death and resurrection, may this ever be your song: Jesus, sinners does receive. Believe it for His sake. It is the holy will of God. Amen.