

Today we continue in our reading from Martin Luther's Small Catechism. Please turn in the folders in your pew to the third chief part: the Lord's Prayer, the Our Father and read with me the Second Petition, which is "Thy Kingdom Come". We read it together:

Thy kingdom come. *What does this mean?* The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also.

***How does God's kingdom come?* God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity.**

Thy kingdom come. We pray those words so often and yet we forget how comforting they are to us in our time of need, our time of pain, our time of sorrow. We ask ourselves the question, "Why do bad things have to happen to good people?" We ask, "In times of suffering and pain, where is God?" We ask ourselves, "If God is love, why doesn't it feel like He answers my prayers the way I want them to be answered?" Martin Luther's explanation answers those questions very clearly. God's kingdom, His very real presence among us, comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray that we would realize this; that we would fear, love and trust in God above all things, giving Him alone all thanks and praise.

And what is God's kingdom: it is right here in this sanctuary, where God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are present. God's kingdom comes when the Word of God is proclaimed in all of its truth and purity and the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith in Jesus Christ as our only Lord and Savior. God's kingdom comes every time someone is baptized and receives the gift of the Holy Spirit, the forgiveness of sins and the promise of heaven. God's kingdom comes every time we come forward to kneel at the altar and receive the gift of Jesus' body and blood for the forgiveness of sins, for life and eternal salvation. God's kingdom comes every time I, your

pastor, assure you that your sins are forgiven, no longer are they held against you. It is through these gifts that God's kingdom comes among us. It is through these means of grace that the devil's kingdom is overthrown, that he has no power over us, that we are victorious. It is through these gifts that Jesus shows us mercy, having compassion upon us, never forgetting us, always doing what is best for us and those whom we love and pray for.

Today is the Fourth Sunday in Lent. Today is Laetare Sunday, which means, "Rejoice all of you". Today we rejoice and are glad! Today is a day of refreshment. Today the church pauses in her journey to the cross and finds renewed strength from her Lord to continue in the well fought fight of faith. Lent, is forty long days of prayer and fasting, repentance and humility, preparing to die with Jesus, clinging to the cross, looking forward to the resurrection from the dead.

During our struggle we are tired, we are in need of refreshment and nourishment; and Jesus takes compassion upon us and feeds us, our cup runs over, goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our life. We are encouraged to seek from our Father all we need for soul and body and He responds by giving us His kingdom, making us members of His kingdom, we shall not be in want. Today we rejoice! We got to sing the Alleluia in the opening hymn! We have not said that word since Jesus was transfigured on the mountain top before Peter, James and John. It has been 50 days since we sang the alleluia, and we have twenty more days until we sing it again with all the exultation of Jesus' resurrection. Rejoice!

In the wilderness of this sinful and dying world we are in need of refreshment and Jesus is sympathetic to that need. Jesus' sympathy anticipates our many wants, even before we pray for it, even before we know we need it. He knows what we need and He bountifully gives it to us. Jesus has sympathy for us, because He has made us, He knows our name, He is never too weary

to show mercy to us; we are His dear brothers and sisters, like Him we are children of the Father, heirs of heaven.

Rejoice! Jesus is the source of our refreshment. He allows us to feel our poverty and know our inability that we would look to Him for relief. Consider how poor are our human thoughts compared with the thoughts of Jesus. Consider how inadequate are our human resources compared to the five barley loaves and two fish. Consider how bad off those 5,000 would be if they had had to depend on the disciples, they would not even have received a crumb. Consider how poor the holy Christian Church would be if she depended on us sinners, we would be in total chaos. But in the realization that we are in need Jesus has drawn us to Himself. Jesus used the need by the disciples to provide for the multitude, and also a need and expectation from the multitude to receive to create and build His kingdom. Blessed are all those who wait for Jesus; they shall never go away empty from Him. In Jesus we shall be filled. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for Jesus' sake, they shall be filled. Rejoice!

This great miracle, the feeding of the 5,000, teaches us that our Lord Jesus Christ, and He alone, is all that we need to satisfy our wanting human hearts. Our Lord can satisfy our fleshly desires and nothing else can; not the government, not pleasure, not our jobs, not our wealth, not teachers, not doctors, nothing can satisfy our desires. Only our Lord alone is Bread to us, He is all the food and drink and medicine that we need. Jesus alone is solid enough, satisfying enough, sustaining enough, living enough, and life-giving enough. In Him there is no want. He has shown us mercy. If we feed upon Him in all that He is and in all that He has done for us, in all His fullness and love, we shall not want. The bread from Jesus very hands never ends. Jesus goes on taking and giving thanks and breaking and distributing as long as it takes until the last child is satisfied. We shall find in Christ more than we ever wanted. We who have wanted, shall

find more than we ever expected to receive. Jesus Christ blesses the meal and the supply will never run short. Jesus has come, He has given us His kingdom, He is the guest at our meal, He has shown us mercy, we are truly blessed. Rejoice!

Today is Truly and day of refreshment. Today, “We give thanks to Almighty God, that He has refreshed us through this salutary gift.” For refreshment we celebrate together the Holy Communion with our Lord and with the saints in heaven and on earth who gather together with us to eat and to drink of all that is good. Today we rejoice, we are members of God’s kingdom, heirs of heaven.

He who supplied the bodily need of the five thousand in the wilderness offers us an abundance of grace and mercy to sustain us as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Jesus gives Himself completely to us for our redemption and our salvation. We put our trust in Him and all that He is and does and says. Our gathering together, as we do today, regularly receiving and eating of Jesus body and blood refreshes us, strengthens us, gives new confidence and courage. It gives us life. The man who eats in this way shall not die but shall live forever. He shall not be in want. Rejoice!

Jesus declared: “I am the Bread of Life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.” “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life . . . abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me will live because of Me.” Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, rejoice, give thanks and sing. Amen.