

Today, we continue to read through Martin Luther's Small Catechism. Please open the folder in your pew to the Third Chief Part dealing with the Lord's Prayer, the Our Father. We read together The Introduction and its meaning.

**Our Father who art in heaven. What does this mean? With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.**

God, our heavenly Father, loves the whole world, He loves His whole creation, He loves you and me so much that He gave His only begotten Son unto death on the cross, that whoever believes in Him would not perish in the fires of hell but have everlasting life in heaven. God, our heavenly Father, loves us so much that He wants to have a close and personal relationship with each one of us. He wants to be with us always unto the end of the age. That is why He sent His Son, to be born of the Virgin Mary, taking upon Himself our sinful flesh, that we might be united together as one flesh. That we would be one family, one body; joined together in an intimate communion with Him. As we remember our Lenten theme, that is what it means to be a witness in Christ, for the Church and the world.

When we were baptized, we became children of God, children of the heavenly Father, brothers and sisters in Christ, members of the family of God. It is in our relationship with Jesus, and the forgiveness of sins that He proclaims to us, the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come that He promises to give us, that we do have a relationship with God our Father. Without Jesus there would be no relationship with Him, we would not be referred to as true children we would not be dear children, not even His dearly beloved. Because God our Father loves His Son Jesus who came down from heaven and died for each one of us on the cross, we have been brought into a loving relationship with our heavenly Father. It is because of

Jesus that we can cry out in prayer with all boldness and confidence. It is because of Jesus that we can cry out in prayer, “Our Father who art in heaven.”

This Sunday is called Reminiscere, which means, “Remember, O Lord”. And what do we desire our heavenly Father to remember, specifically His tender mercies toward us: that He is slow to anger toward us in our sin, that He is compassionate toward us when we fall short of His glory, that He is abounding in steadfast love toward us His true children. We plead with God to be mindful of His mercy and steadfast love, we remember our failings, our shortcomings, our sins. His mercy is constant, but we frequently forget and fall back into our old ways. Yet we lift up our hearts unto the Lord trusting in Him to forgive and forget, to deliver us from all evil.

As sinners, we humbly lift up our soul to God in confession of our failings, our inadequacies, that we would find healing and strength in Him, whose mighty arms lift us up. God sees that of ourselves we have no strength. We plead in our prayers for His merciful help toward us in our time of need. We cry out for help, humbling ourselves before God, remembering that we are weak and defenseless; we are in need of God to help us.

In our Gospel lesson for this morning we hear Jesus say, “It is not right to give the children's bread to the dogs.” Jesus does not seem to care about the woman or her needs. But this woman is bold. She does not go away sulking, feelings hurt or saddened by Jesus’ response. She does not say, “I am not a dog! I am not a poor miserable sinner!” This mother does not become defensive. She does make excuses: that she has worked hard, that her daughter is a good person, that she deserves what she asks for. She accepts what Jesus says and simply demands to be heard. She wants Jesus to remember His loving kindness. She keeps on asking, seeking, and knocking. Her response was to fall down in humble obedience and worship Jesus, to demand to be heard. Her prayer for her daughter's demon possession was simply, “Lord, help me.”

The woman says, “Yes, Lord; yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the Lord's table.” In other words, what she is saying to Jesus is, “Put me in your lap, Lord. Scratch behind my ear. Throw me the ball. And let me eat what falls from the loaf of which You eat. I want a part of Your bread. I want to be one of Your little dogs.” The woman wants to have a relationship with Jesus. Like Jesus, she wants to be a child of God, a son of the heavenly Father. And she will, even if it means eating the crumbs that fall from His table.

The woman wants to be richly and daily provided for. For herself and her daughter. She wants to be fed with the Bread from Heaven, the Bread of Life. She wants to receive the grace of Jesus. She knows that God the heavenly Father will feed her, he will provide for all that she needs to support her body and life; she just waits for His will to be done. And so we see she is not ashamed to beg. She is not afraid to humble herself and agree with Jesus that she is a little dog. She is not ashamed of being a poor miserable sinner, in need of a Savior, in need of Jesus to go to the cross and die for her, shedding His blood for her, giving His body for her. She knows that in Jesus there is forgiveness.

But Jesus acts strangely. Why does the Lord ignore the woman? I don't know. Why do the disciples ask Jesus to send the woman away? I don't know. Is this because they are annoyed and tired of the cries or are they embarrassed that Jesus ignores her? Does His silence, His ignoring of her cry concern them? I don't know. But I do know this, I feel just like the disciples. How many times I have felt as though the Lord ignored the prayers of people sorely in need. How I, the pastor, the professional church worker, have wished for a miracle not only to help the needy but also to show that God is real and has the power to save. The disciples are helpless and so am I. We all depend on Jesus grace and mercy, and so we wait. The apostles and the woman stand before demons and they are helpless. Just as we stand before cancer, war, poverty,

destruction and we are helpless. All we can do is pray, “Our Father” and wait, confident that we will be heard, trusting that His good and gracious will is being done.

And this is exactly our heavenly Father’s intent. His holy will is that His pastors would pray and that the people would pray, that we would come to Him in humility, with all boldness and confidence of dear children asking their dear father. The woman is bold and confident in her prayer. She is humble as she comes before God. She wants one thing. She wants Jesus, she wants to share in His bread, she wants a loving relationship with Him. She wants to eat with Jesus, to be in fellowship with Jesus, to be with Jesus. The woman truly is a witness in Christ, for the Church and the world.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, when we come to the Lord’s Supper, we are like the woman, we are asking for bread from Jesus; even for the little crumbs. We are asking to receive Jesus in all of His fullness, in all of His goodness. We are desiring to receive His body, crucified and risen, given to us to eat with our mouths, that we would have the forgiveness of sins, that we would have both physical and spiritual healing. And when we humble ourselves and come to the altar Jesus is having mercy upon us, He is delivering us and our children from demons. In His mercy, Jesus is remembering us, delivering us from all evil, it has no power over us. Jesus is strengthening us, nourishing us, building us up in the way we should go. Like the woman, when we come to the Lord’s Supper we are witnesses of Jesus Christ, to each other and to the world.

Jesus hears the woman's prayer. He gives Himself completely to her. The demons depart from the woman and her daughter, they are banished forever. So too does Jesus hear all our prayers and He answers them; He gives Himself to us in His Bread and body as a reminder. The demons cannot have us. They cower in fear. In Christ, we are victorious. We are children of God. He is our dear Father and we are His true children. “Great is our faith!” Amen.