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St. John's Lutheran Church – Kimball, NE

Lent IV–Midweek (members of Immanuel Burns, Zion Grover, Grace Pine Bluffs present)

March 17, 2021

Text: Lord's Prayer; SC III, 5th & 6th Petitions

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We have covered much over these past few weeks. I trust that you see the great importance the Lord has placed upon your prayers. He has commanded us to pray, promised to answer them, and provided the perfect prayer, the Lord's Prayer. The world depends upon your prayers. The three estates which God the Holy Trinity established and ordained for ordered life in this world leading into the next are served in large measure by your prayers. Day by day, we Christians pray for homes and families (the domestic estate), for governments, magistrates, all forms of useful labor and learning, military, agriculture, and the business sectors (the civic estate), and finally, for the growth of Christ's holy Church, the preaching of the gospel, and the extension of God's kingdom among us (the churchly estate).

We pray for and intercede on behalf of the three estates out of love for God and man; this is the positive part of our prayers. At the same time, we pray against every form of evil that seeks to undermine the three estates; our motivation is the same, love for God and man. This is the negative part of our prayers. We Christians are enrolled in a spiritual battle between the powers of darkness and God's kingdom of light. Because of Christ's perfect death and resurrection, the outcome of this war is determined. But the battle rages on until the Last Day.

We Christians are victorious and triumphant in Christ. That must be known and believed. A few hours before Jesus died for the sins of the world, Jesus instructed His disciples that the ruler of this world, the devil, is judged (John 16:11) and He (i.e., Jesus) has overcome the world (John 16:33). And the apostle John, having heard those words directly from Jesus, wrote in his first epistle two things that we Christians ought never forget. The first is that the reason why Christ Jesus came into this world was to destroy the works of the devil (I John 3:8). Second, our faith in Christ has overcome the world (I John 5:4). Through faith in Christ Jesus, we are victorious. But the days are long, the battle difficult, and it's easy to grow weary. Our consciences become burdened because we have sinned against others. And they have sinned against us. Day by day, we need to refreshing strength and peace of Christ's Gospel.

Keeping in mind this on-going spiritual struggle, we turn to the 5th and 6th petitions of the Lord's Prayer. In them, we find strength for the journey through this world into the glorious inheritance of the New Creation. Before we look at these two petitions in more detail, I need to highlight a significant change in the pattern and structure of the Catechism's explanations. The four previous petitions had this unique, consistent pattern of praying for things that will happen even if we do not pray. So, God's name is holy in itself without our prayers, God's kingdom comes without our prayers, God's will is accomplished without our prayers, and God provides daily bread to all people even unbelievers without our prayers. But we Christians pray those four petitions in faith asking for them to be done in our lives because we want them to be done among us, to us, and for us so that our entire life may be lived in all three estates in joyful courage and godly thanksgiving. Our prayers don't make these godly things happen. But we seek and ask for them because they contain God's blessing and life.

The remaining petitions require and assume the new birth of the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus. While we Christians pray all of the petitions in faith, these last petitions are uniquely based upon the promises of the gospel and life in the Spirit. They uniquely represent the Christian life. So, we consider the 5th Petition of the Lord's Prayer, "And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

The Catechism question is "What does this mean?"

Answer: "We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us."

The forgiveness of sins has been won for the entire world through the death and resurrection of Jesus. That is the heart and core of the Gospel. Our prayer for forgiveness does not create forgiveness. But Christians know, through the divine testimony of Holy Scripture, that in Christ Jesus there is full and completely forgiveness. So we seek it, day by day. Christians pray this prayer because they believe the Gospel and have received the "washing of regeneration and renewal of the Spirit" in Christian baptism, as described in Titus 3:5.

Thank be to God that our Father "has given us the Gospel, in which is pure forgiveness before we prayed or even thought about it. But the purpose of this prayer

is that we recognize and receive such forgiveness” (LC III:88). Herein lies the struggle of Christian faith and life in the Spirit. “The flesh in which we daily live is of such a nature that it neither trusts nor believes God. It is ever active in evil lusts and devices, so that we sin daily in word and deed by what we do and fail to do. By this the conscience is thrown into unrest, so that it is afraid of God’s wrath and displeasure. So it loses the comfort and confidence derived from the Gospel. Therefore, it is always necessary that we run here and receive consolation to comfort the conscience again” (LC III:89).

By praying this petition day after day, we are constantly reminded that we live under the love and grace in all areas of life. For this reason, we also seek to bestow forgiveness to one another. We daily sin much and deserve nothing but punishment. And yet, the Father forgives us freely because of Jesus. Having been so loved and forgiven, we seek to forgive sincerely and do good to those who have sinned against us. “As we forgive those who trespass against us” is a comforting reminder that the readiness to forgive is not only God’s will and attitude toward the world, but it becomes our will and attitude toward our neighbor. Our desire and willingness to forgive those who sin against us serves as “a sign (or testimony of the Holy Spirit) alongside the promise (of the Gospel)” (LC III:96).

The Lord Jesus taught us about this blessed reciprocity of being forgiven by God and then, in turn, seeking to forgive one another. “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matt. 6:14–15). We do not earn forgiveness by forgiving others. Christ alone, by His death and resurrection, earned forgiveness for the world. We seek to give that which we have freely received. To withhold forgiveness unjustly is inconsistent with the Gospel of Jesus. The comfort of this 5th Petition is that not only are we free from the condemnation of our sins through Christ but we are also set free from exacting retribution and punish from those who sin against us. Only the gospel of the free forgiveness of sin can give such glorious liberty.

Even though we know the freedom of the Gospel, we still live in this fallen, corrupted world, face the temptations of our sinful nature, and must withstand the attacks of the devil. Let us, then, consider the 6th Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “And lead us not into temptation.”

The Catechism question is “What does this mean?”

Answer: “God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory.”

According to Scripture, we daily struggle against the temptations of the flesh, of the world, and of the devil (LC III:101). As Christian believers, “we dwell in the flesh and carry the old Adam about our neck. He exerts himself and encourages us daily to unchastity, laziness, gluttony and drunkenness, greed and deception, to defraud our neighbor and to overcharge him” as described in Gal. 5:19-21, Col. 3:5-8, etc. (LC III:102).

“Next comes the world, which offends us in word and deed. It drives us to anger and impatience. In short, there is nothing but hatred and envy, hostility, violence and wrong, unfaithfulness, vengeance, cursing, railing, slander, pride and haughtiness, with useless finery, honor, fame, and power” (LC III:103). The NT authors, James and John both wrote that friendship with the world means enmity with God (James 4:4; I John 2:15).

Finally, “then comes the devil, pushing and provoking in all directions. But he especially agitates matters that concern the conscience and spiritual affairs. He leads us to despise and disregard God’s Word and works. He tears us away from faith, hope, and love, and he brings us into misbelief, false security, and stubbornness...” (LC III:104). It is not without reason that the apostle Paul admonished the Ephesian Christians to put on the full armor of God that we might be able to stand in the evil day against the devil’s schemes and deflect his fiery darts (Eph. 6:10–18). St. Paul concludes this powerful admonition with “praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints...” We resist the temptations of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh and find victory through faith in Christ coupled with the two-edged sword of God’s Word and fervent prayer.

One final distinction must be made. “To feel temptation is a far different thing from consenting or yielding to it. We must feel it...or it could not be called a temptation” (LC III:107, 108). Though we know and feel temptations powerfully, we “take hold of the Lord’s Prayer, and speak to God from the heart...” (LC III:110). We have God’s

promise from James 4:7, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

The honor given to each of you as God’s redeemed child is truly amazing. May the Lord continue to raise us up to be powerful intercessors for the glory of His name and the salvation of His redeemed people.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.