

MEDITATIONS AND PRAYERS ON *THE LORD'S PRAYER*

The Address: *Our Father who art in heaven*

Father, dear Father! That's what I dare to call you. For out of your inestimable grace and mercy it has pleased you to call me your child. In spite of the sin and shame in which I was conceived and born, you adopted me to be your own. Yes, and you did it not by laying aside your own holiness. You did it by sending your only begotten Son to bear my sin and shame and then to wash it all way in the sacred flood of Baptism. Purchased by His blood, washed and reclaimed by your free grace in the Sacrament, I now dare to call you *Father, dear Father*.

And such a Father you are! You dwell in heaven, high above all earthly toil and turmoil. Over it all you reign and rule. So exalted and powerful are you that I, your child and a joint heir with your beloved Son, my Savior, need fear nothing in time or in eternity. You will not and can never abandon or forsake me. Too precious was the price you paid for my redemption, too dear the blood that bought me.

Yes, Father, dear Father, you who inhabit the praises of the saints and angels in heaven, you bring me a glimpse of your glory in heaven even now. For where is there a heaven on earth? It is not in perishing wealth or fleeting popularity. It is not in perfect health that one day is here and tomorrow gone. It is not in any earthly joy or success or prosperity, as thankful as I am to you for these when you send them. No, you give me a glimpse of heaven whenever you draw near to me in your Word and sacraments. There I see Jesus, my brother. There I hear his sweet voice assuring me that all of his holiness is mine when sin is forgiven. There I see him when he comes with his own true body and blood to feed my soul that longs alone for his presence. There he raises me up with the assurance that those who come to him he will never, no never cast out.

As an earthly father disciplines his children when they misbehave, so you also show your love by discipline when I stray from humble obedience to your Word. Ah, but this is my comfort in the suffering that you send to me as a result of my sins: You never send the full consequences of my sin, else I would perish forever. You chasten me neither too much nor too little as an earthly father often does. You are not fickle or arbitrary in your fatherly acts in my life. Always you are the perfect Father, the Father who sees everything, knows everything and then acts in love to bring me to repentance and to draw me ever closer to you. What an amazing thing that is! With all world before you, the great and the small, the pious and the wicked, you never run out of time or wisdom or energy to act as my heavenly Father!

What a delight then it is for me to address you, Father, dear Father, you who are in heaven and you who by Word and sacraments brings heaven so close to me. Unseen and veiled is now the view. But that does not make it any less real. And so, prompted by your Word and trusting in your promise, I dare to claim you as my Father and to now draw near to you, exalted as you are in the heaven above the heavens. For as far as that may be, you are nevertheless as near as your Word and promise on which I rely and in which I place my trust. So then, dear Father, hear me as I pray.

The First Petition: *Hallowed be Thy Name*

With such a rich and mighty and loving Father, what then should I ask of you? Should I ask for all the wealth of the world? No; who needs it, when the Father has promised to provide for all that I need in this life and the next and has already purchased it for me in the work of his Son and my Savior. Should I seek before all freedom from care and want? Why ask for that when I know that every care or want that you send me is designed to remind me and to keep me from forgetting that all my wants you supply as is best for me and all my cares your Son carries with me. Should I seek comfort and ease when you have promised that only through many trials and tribulations we enter into your kingdom?

No, none of that will be of first importance to me. This and only this is my first and may it be my all-consuming desire: Father, dear Father, may your name be holy! Yes, I know that your name and your revelation of that name as God and Father and Savior is already holy. And I know too that it can never be made more holy than it already is, certainly not by me or by anything that I might do.

Nevertheless, Father, dear Father, how I long for your name to be manifest as holy in me, in all that I do and think and say. And so I beg of you, as the very first thing that I could desire of you: Grant me this grace and favor, that my heart and mind may ever and alone cling to your Word in all of its truth and purity. For there I not only learn your holy name of Father and Savior but receive it as your free gift when you clothe me in the holiness of your only begotten Son. Keep close to me and me close to you by that saving, that holy Word, that revelation and gift of yourself to me. Grant that I do not waver in my love and loyalty to all that you reveal in your precious and saving Word. Yes, save me from the foolishness and the wickedness of setting aside anything that you have said for the nonsense and the evil that my own heart might prefer. For then your name, all-holy in itself, will be kept holy in the shrine that you have made of my heart by the power and gift of your yourself to me in your holy and saving Word.

Yes, and may your name made holy in my heart by your Word also more and more be seen as holy in my life, in what I say and do at home and away, before friend and stranger. As of old people knew that Christians had been with your Son by the way they lived with one another and in the world, so may it be with me. May those who see me and know me see you in my words and works. May your gift of holiness find a reflection, dim and imperfect though it will ever be this side of heaven, in words unstained by anger or hatred or spite or envy or malice. May my works as well reflect the unselfishness which you and your Son have so perfectly shown in my salvation and in all that you have given me besides. May your holiness so live in me and through me that my works may be a visible evidence of an unselfish zeal for service to those around me, a zeal which seeks neither praise nor reward but only the pleasure of reflecting your perfect holiness.

Then Father dear Father I will have this as my greatest joy that your name is holy in my heart and seen as holy in my life!

The Second Petition: *Thy kingdom come*

I know, Father, dear Father, that just as your name is holy in itself, so too your kingdom comes when and where you will it to come. But I beg of you that your kingdom, your all wise and gracious rule may come over me and to my life. For another kingdom rages and another wants to rule in me and that to my eternal ruin. The devil and his hellish allies in the world and in my own sinful flesh seek by night and day to drive your rule out of my heart and life. I see that and know it every day. Yes, so familiar is their warfare in the world and in me that I become

numb and dumb to it. I forget that the devil is a liar and a murderer from the beginning. He is a master of a thousand arts as he seeks to seduce me into pride, self-service, lust, greed and all manner of false doctrine and vile deeds. Left to myself I am so perverse in my sinful nature that I would easily and even eagerly bend my neck to his obedience and fall into unbelief that alternates between arrogant self-righteousness and despair. Then finally there would be nothing left for me but the torments of the damned when this miserable life has reached its wretched end.

Therefore Father, dear Father, I beg of you, confident that you will keep your Word and promise, trusting that you will not deny my cry for help. May your kingdom ever come to me. Rule in me by your Word. Preserve your throne in my heart by that so powerful message that I am indeed your own dear child because of what your Son has done to win my adoption. Bring me by that saving Word to ever and to gladly bow before your scepter. Keep your gracious promise to preserve that faith which trusts you alone for salvation and finds in your Word alone the guide and the strength for a life of obedience.

Then Father, dear Father, in your rule over all the earth, so govern that nothing in it may turn my gaze from you. Help me to recognize your might and your kindness to me in the world that you created and over which you rule. As of your royal bounty you give me your gifts of time and health, of friends and family, of a measure of this world's wealth and beauty, keep me ever mindful that you, my Father and King, have given it all to me by grace. The knowledge that all of it comes from your royal generosity will make the enjoyment of it all the sweeter. And at the same time as I offer up never ending prayers of thanksgiving keep me from turning these gifts into the gods and goals of my life; keep me from the worship that loves the gifts more than their Giver. Rather may your gifts become more and more tools for service as they are occasions for thanksgiving.

So then, Father, dear Father, let me live under your gracious rule. Then finally let me die in peace with the sure and certain knowledge that your rule knows no death. For so powerful was your Son that he triumphed over the grave, and that not just for himself, but for me as well. Oh how blessed then will be my lot! I will see Jesus. I will see him, the King of kings and Lord of lords. I will see him who loved me and gave himself for me. Made perfect by his blood, I will rejoice forever before his throne in the company of all the saints and angels. I will finally - - oh blessed thought - - obey him free from all further sin and temptation.

Yes, Father, dear Father, may your kingdom come!

The Third Petition: *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*

What a hard petition this is for me to pray! It is my own will that I would much rather see carried out than anyone else's will. It is just as your Word has declared it and I have experienced it a thousand times and more in my life: The will of man is desperately wicked from youth on. Much of the misery in my life stems from nothing more than the desire to have my will done, to get my own way. I vainly imagine that what I want is best, otherwise I wouldn't want it. And anyone therefore who thinks otherwise is wrong and probably evil. From infancy that has been my experience; when I did not get my own way, I cried and screamed until someone paid attention to me and gave me what I wanted. In the passing of time, I have realized that crying and screaming may no longer have that desired effect; but that hasn't changed the goal. All that has changed is the means used to try and have my will triumph over those in the way, be it by force or threat, by sheer stubbornness or manipulation. And when my own will does not triumph over that of another, I grudgingly compromise or maybe even give way - - but not willingly, not

glad for the opportunity to make someone else happy. And so begins one argument after another, followed by continuing anger and bitterness and the desire to get even.

And so your will, O holy God and loving Father, I would in my sinful nature prefer to set aside in favor of my own perverse will. It is your will that I put everyone else first and myself last as the servant of all. But it is my will that I be first and served by all. It is your will that I see my salvation as entirely your gift. It is my will that I should get at least some of the credit for it because I'm not as bad as some others I could mention - - not even as bad as I could have been. It is your will that I submit even gladly to the sorrows of this life and accept them as sorrows that you have allowed either to bring me to repentance or to bring me to see that in having you and your Word I have everything I need and more. But my will complains and calls you unjust when others prosper at my expense, even when others are merely more successful than I think they deserve to be. When I suffer, my first thought is not that your will is always best; my first thought is that it just isn't fair that I should endure this and that when so many others seem to get away with every evil word and deed that suits them.

And so, Father dear Father, given the depths of the rebellion that still persists in my fallen will, this is a hard petition for me to pray. Precisely because it is so difficult, I need all the more that you hear my cry and grant that your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. To be sure, ultimately it is your will that is always done. But now I pray that your will may win the happy victory over my will. I pray that you will enlighten my understanding by an ever greater knowledge and understanding of your Word, so that I may consciously strive the more to bring my will into submitting harmony with the will you have revealed in your Word.

To that end, Father dear Father, move me by your love and grace to ask again and again not *What's in it for me?* but rather *How can my words and works, my plans and ambitions better serve those around me and so reflect this fundamental and all important fact that you are my Father and I am your child, eager to do what pleases you? For then your will will be done in me and through me.*

The Fourth Petition: *Give us this day our daily bread.*

Father, dear Father, it's embarrassing for me to pray this petition. For I fear that I would grumble and loudly complain if you heard and answered it just as it stands. How ungrateful I would probably be if you that's all that you gave me for my daily life, just bread, whether a crust or a loaf. To be sure, I don't deserve even that. To be sure, if the devil had his way I wouldn't get even that either.

And so I lift my eyes to the face of your dear Son who fed the thousands with just a few pieces of bread and some small fish. But me he has fed with more than I need and in such rich abundance that I can only marvel at your generosity. Not just bread, not just bread and fish, but all manner of fruits and vegetables, of meats and desserts. So constantly do you supply me with what I need and more that I am tend to take it all for granted. Even worse I foolishly imagine that it is all mine by right because of how hard I work and how good I am.

But still even when I am thoughtless as an infant of where it all comes from, you provide me richly and daily with what I need and more. And then to make it all taste the better you give peace in our land so that our fields and forests are not destroyed and the nation reduced to famine. To make it all sweet you give friends and family with whom to enjoy it. And even when some of these things are withdrawn for a season or made scarce, you promise us that you will give us what we need until you perfectly fulfill our every need in heaven.

Yes, Father, dear Father, all these things necessary for the support of our body and life in this world have as their greatest blessing this: By the strength and health and wealth that you have showered on us in your grace we receive the physical and mental strength to make it our goal to hallow your name. For if we were without your blessing of the table, of the state, of fields and forest, of friends and family it would be much more difficult for us to lead a life that seeks before all else that your name be hallowed by our life and doctrine. We would be tempted to despair over earthly things and thus to fail to hallow your name.

Therefore Father, dear Father, give us this day our daily bread. Shower us still with your abundance that we may hallow your name with thanksgiving and with a generous sharing of your bounty. For then your name will be seen as holy; then others will know that you are our kind Father when we act in generosity as you have acted.

Finally and as the sum of all, grant me yet this blessing that I receive with joy and thanksgiving all that you give me as my kind and loving Father, whether the abundance of the holiday table enjoyed with friends and family or the vinegar of sorrow and loss seasoned with the salt of tears that come to remind me that having you, having your Son, having your Word and sacraments I still have everything; help me to remember that you give me always what I most need and more than I could either ask for or deserve. And remembering that, grant me the grace of a growing generosity that shares your gifts with those in need that they too may pray this petition with confidence and thanksgiving.

The Fifth Petition: (Part I) *Forgive us our trespasses ...*

With what anguish I begin this petition. How can it be that I still have trespasses that need to be forgiven. After all, any possible excuse for my sins disappears when you have answered the first four petitions of this prayer. You give me daily bread so that I may have the energy to hallow your name. By your promise, yes by your rich answer to that prayer you have freed me from fear of tomorrow; therefore I have no excuse for greed and selfishness which I might think I have, were I left alone in this world to provide by myself for myself. And then so you bring me your kingdom in the gospel of forgiveness so that I have no excuse for the sin of doubting your love and fearing your wrath. Nor do I have any excuse to engage in a vain and ungrateful struggle to appease your righteous anger against my sin by my own works. And you still accomplish your will by preserving your Word and sacraments for my use so that I continue in your kingdom as your dear child and an heir of your Son's eternal inheritance. What then could ever provoke or move me to indifference toward your Word or unwillingness to serve those that you have placed near to me so that I could serve them? Yes, what possible excuse could I have ever to despair over the past or fear about the future or doubt about anything that you have said in your Word?

And so my heart is broken on the rack and wheel of the still remaining constant need to pray for forgiveness. So perverse am I and so corrupt is my nature that having no excuse at all I nevertheless have to say it each day and could properly repeat it every hour of the day: Father, dear Father forgive me! For one minute I delude myself into thinking I am better than those around me and the next I recall my own guilt and despair of any hope of redemption. One minute I congratulate myself on how clever I am; I imagine that I have acquired all that I have by my own cleverness and effort. Then the next minute I fear that I will not have enough for tomorrow. One minute I am decent at least by the corrupt standards of our day, and the next minute I am plagued with temptations that I shun only because I am afraid of getting caught. One minute I am

reasonable agreeable to those around me who are pleasant and the next minute I am irritated by those who don't sufficiently appreciate me. One minute I am pleasant and the next minute annoyed by people who just don't get out of my way. One minute I am polite enough, and the next minute I'm ready to lash out at someone who uttered the slightest criticism of my person or work.

But still I dare to pray it: Father, dear Father forgive me, a thousand time a day, forgive me! I dare to pray it only because your Son has taught me to pray it. How well he understands me! How amazing that in understanding me, he does not shun me or cast me off. Whose love and grace can be compared with his? For who would every say to another: "Ask every hour and I will forgive you, because I know that every hour you will need forgiveness for new offenses and sins against me!" How beyond reason his love and yours that you invite me to pray this petition and by in so doing assure me of a gracious answer, the answer that Jesus gave in the gospel: The one who comes to me I will never cast out (John 6:37). And so with broken heart and contrite sigh I fall down before you and plead for mercy; and then with confidence in your promise to hear my pray for Jesus' sake who taught to pray thus, I rise up with unbounded joy and thanksgiving.

(Part II) ... *as we forgive those who trespass against us.*

Is there no end to it? Is it possible to exhaust the list of things I could utter in the secret of my confession to you, of sins in thought known to none but you, of words and deeds uncounted by any but you? No there is no end to it! And were I to even try to make a list, I would get nothing done all day long. But nevertheless your Son bids pray thus, and so I gladly say in the confidence that you will hear and answer: Forgive me my sins, all of them, every day and every hour.

But what is this is that your Son has invited me to say whenever I pray for your forgiveness! *Father, forgive me as I forgive those who sin against me?* Am I to be your example, Holy Father? Do I really want you to follow me and forgive as I have forgiven? If that were so and his intent, then I would pray this petition and every petition with dread and horror. For the reality is that it is very hard for me to forgive at least some of those who have sinned against me. I cry out with my grudges and in anger: "But you don't realize what they did to me! And they did it after all that I have done for them!" If I have such a hard time forgiving those whose sins against me are mole-hills compared to the mountain of my sins against you, how then dare I expect that you will ever forgive me anything?

But nevertheless there it is: Forgive as I forgive those who sin against me! Forgive me, Father dear Father, not least of all for my failure to perfectly forgive or to as eagerly forgive as you do. I forgive with a struggle; I forgive and learn to forgive only when I ponder the greatness of your forgiveness. I forgive only as a sinner can forgive, weakly, imperfectly; forgive me, Father, as only God can forgive - - completely, perfectly and that because the price of my weak forgiveness, even that has been paid by your Son on the cross.

And then by the perfection of your forgiveness grant me this grace that I grow in forgiving as you forgive. For that's how your kingdom comes! Just as you give daily bread so that I may grow in keeping your name holy (the First Petition), so your kingdom comes (the Second Petition) when sins are forgiven. For by the forgiveness that you give in Word and sacraments you establish your throne and your rule in my heart and life. And it is that forgiveness that we share in our lives with one another day by day, even though weakly and imperfectly.

Then, Father dear Father, grant me the grace to treasure all the more the gift of forgiveness that I both receive and give in church every Sunday. For there I confess with all my brothers and sisters in Christ that I have sinned. And there your called servant forgives me in your name. And there I say "Amen" as he forgives also those around me who have made the same confession; I say "Amen" to acknowledge that indeed my sins are forgiven and so are their sins, forgiven by you and yes, forgiven by me too! And so your kingdom comes! And so your throne and rule in my heart and in theirs is confirmed and strengthened. And so you forgive us our trespasses even as we forgive one another. Ah, how blessed is your kingdom; it is all about forgiveness; it comes and continues as you forgive and as in your name we forgive one another. So Father, dear Father, forgive perfectly as we forgive in your name that your gracious rule may be established grow in our hearts and in our lives.

The Sixth Petition: *And lead us not into temptation*

What a prayer this is that your Son has bid us pray! See how he invites me to cast the entire responsibility for my rescue from temptation on your gracious and mighty leading. He knows and I know it too even if imperfectly that left to myself I plunge headlong into my favorite sins and into countless others that I dismiss as of no importance. He knows and so do I how I consider everybody else's sins serious and my own trivial and how therefore I easily play with temptation. He knows and so do I that I even enjoy some of the temptations that plague me. I didn't get even with so and so who harmed me - - but I still want to; I don't commit some of the really flagrant sins of murder, rebellion, adultery, robbery and the like. But I don't recoil against the temptations to grudges and gossip, to picking and choosing which laws of the state I will keep and which violate if I can get away with it, to clutching too closely my bank account and fearing that I may be giving away too much of it. Oh how wide is the path of temptations that I toy with! Left to myself I would run that highway to my ruin and perish eternally in the grip of sins and shames great and small.

And therefore, Father dear Father, even this I beg of you and cast the responsibility for it at your feet. I know where my own sinful flesh leads; it pulls and drags me to everything that is contrary to your will in both the law and the gospel. I have prayed that your will may be done in me. And so I beg of you, if your will is to be done on earth as it is in heaven, then you must lead me and guide me away from temptation. You must protect me from temptations that are so powerful that I would perish in them. You must put a hedge around my heart and life so that I do not perish even when I have shoved aside your leading and fallen into the pit of my own making. You must lead me back again as you teach me by suffering in life and shame in my conscience to fear the consequences of my unbridled passions. And then you must deliver me from the shame of my stricken conscience by your continuing and so gracious forgiveness; for without that I will yield to the temptation to despair. Yes, you must show me your Father's heart in the cross of your dear Son so that in spite of my own perversity I strive to follow the leading of your Word so that more and more your will is done in me, and less my own will. For the more you lead, so much the more will your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. See, Father, I cast myself entirely at your feet; see Father, I declare my total dependence on you, on your mercy, on the leading you give in your Word. When you lead by your forgiveness and guide by your instruction there hell is put far away and heaven draws near to earth, to me and in me. Help me to remember that so that I may the more gladly yield to your leading and abhor my own.

The Seventh Petition: *But deliver us from evil.*

What nerve it takes to come to the close of this prayer with this petition. If your Son had not taught us thus to pray, who would dare utter this request? I have asked that your name be holy in my heart and life; but then I have disgraced it by cherishing opinion that argue with your Word and set aside your law. I have asked that your kingdom come, and then have resisted your rule. I have prayed that your will be done and then have put my own will ahead of your will revealed in your Word. I have asked you to forgive as I forgive; but how difficult it is for me at times to forgive as you forgive. I have begged you to lead and then have followed the lead of my own perverse heart or the lead of others who care nothing for your Word.

In sum from the beginning to the end of this prayer I have cast myself on your grace and mercy. From the beginning to the end of it I have confessed that is not just what I have thought or said or done that needs cleansing; it is my whole self that stands in need of pardon and grace heaped upon grace. For it is not just that I have sinned; it is rather the fact that I am a sinner and that therefore all I know by nature is how to sin - - it is for that above all else that I need your mercy.

I now I come with this petition: Deliver from evil! Rescue me from all the evil consequences of my sins. Save me from the clutches of the devil. Rip me out of the jaws of hell. Do not let its flames engulf me in the hour of death and on the day of your just judgment. Even in this life do not deal with me as my sins and my sinful nature deserve. Deliver me from the shame that I would have if everyone around me knew all that I have done to deserve disgrace. Deliver me from the terrors of mind and the afflictions of the body that would be mine if I had to suffer even here for each of my offenses in my mind and sins committed with my mouth, my eyes, my ears, my hands and feet. Even if I sound little different from the thief who asks that he be allowed to enjoy the fruits of his wickedness, nevertheless I pray: Father, dear Father, deliver us from evil.

There it is dear Father! Your Son has taught me to pray this petition. And so, trusting in his merit and in your mercy, confident in the promises of your Word, I dare to say it yet again: Deliver me from the evil consequences of my sins in this life and the eternal suffering that I have deserved in the life to come. I know that you have sent me sorrow that seemed evil to me in the past and that I will see suffering in the future. But I know as well that such sorrow and suffering never comes near to what I deserve. More than that I know that what sorrow you send and what suffering I endure is not evil when it comes from you. Rather it is a great blessing. For it turns my heart to repentance and to trust in your help and deliverance both now and in the hour of my death. Thus when I pray this petition I do not ask that you spare me from every pain; for that you never promised. Instead I ask that you chasten with a rod of compassion and afflict with a father's heart that seeks to rescue rather than to wound.

For Thine is the kingdom

And I wouldn't have it any other way! You and you alone rule in the kingdom of the world. And you have assured me in your Word that your rule is always for the benefit of those who love and trust you. Even to old age and to the hour of death you guide and govern the times and the tides so that I need not fear even though the mountains fall into the depths of the sea. You, my Father, my God, my Savior will rescue me from death and the torments of the damned and bring me to your heavenly kingdom where I will worship and adore you for all eternity.

And you rule as well in the kingdom of your church with your holy gospel and the sacraments. And I wouldn't have that any other way either. For left to my own rule there I would have only doubt and fear, only ignorance and superstition. But in the kingdom ruled by your Word I have the certainty of your grace and mercy; I have peace of conscience in the knowledge of the perfect forgiveness Jesus has won for me. And with your Word I know what works will please you, my only King, in my heart and mind and life.

For Thine is the power

And I wouldn't have it any other way! For all my powers are nothing and accomplish nothing without your gracious aid and protection. How blest I am that you have been pleased to use your power for my rescue and my redemption. My feeble efforts would have left me in the powerful jaws of the devil who plots and strives by night and by day to ruin me for time and for eternity. But the resurrection of your Son has won for me the assurance that the devil's power is shattered and I am free. I am guarded by your might in this life and will finally be lifted up to heaven by it in the hour of death and raised by it from the dust on the Last Day.

For Thine is the glory forever and ever. Amen!

And I wouldn't have it any other way! To you and to you alone belongs the glory for all that is good and best in my life here. To you and to you alone belongs the glory for my conversion and the preservation of my faith. To you and to you alone belongs the glory for my final rescue in the hour of death. And to you and to you alone, O Father, Son and Holy Spirit I gladly sing praises forever and ever, here imperfectly in union with the church and finally in heaven and there perfectly with all the saints and angels.

And so I say *Amen*, confident that you will hear and receive my prayer. For your Son has taught me to pray it. And he has won for me your ever kind and gracious hearing and your rich answer to these his petitions.

Amen and Amen!