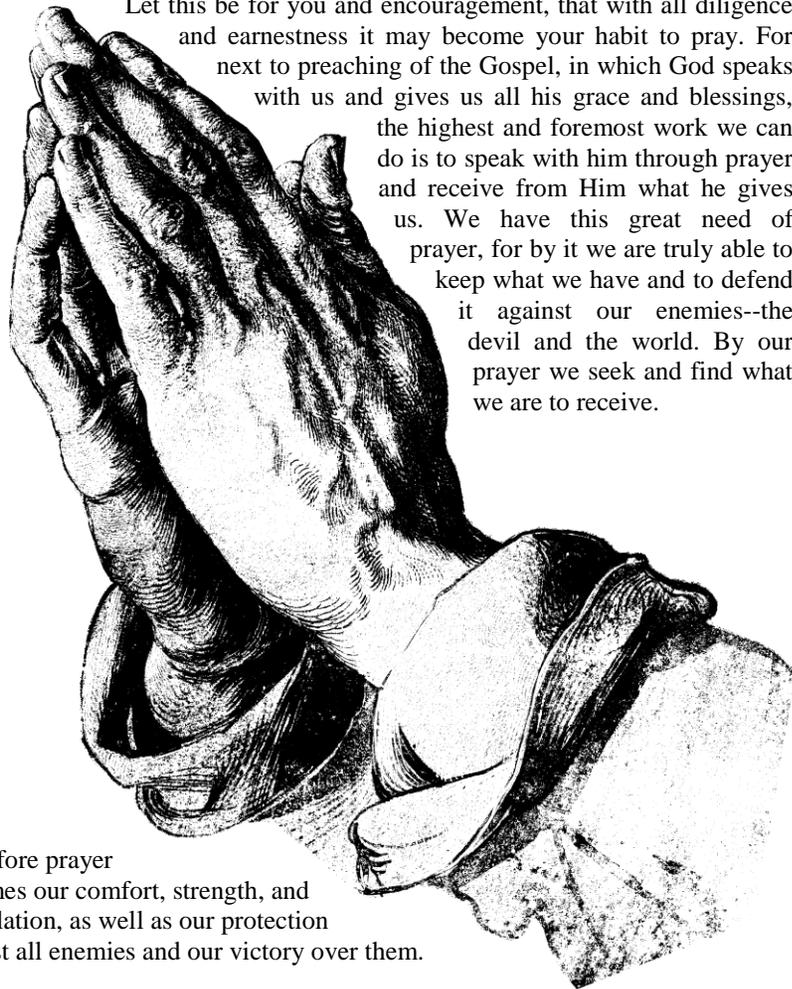


# Pray Without Ceasing

## Lenten Devotions based on the Lord's Prayer

By Philip Quardokus



Let this be for you and encouragement, that with all diligence and earnestness it may become your habit to pray. For next to preaching of the Gospel, in which God speaks with us and gives us all his grace and blessings, the highest and foremost work we can do is to speak with him through prayer and receive from Him what he gives us. We have this great need of prayer, for by it we are truly able to keep what we have and to defend it against our enemies--the devil and the world. By our prayer we seek and find what we are to receive.

Therefore prayer becomes our comfort, strength, and consolation, as well as our protection against all enemies and our victory over them.

Praying Hands  
Albrecht Dürer  
1508

**Martin Luther**  
**Exposition of John 16:23, 1537**  
**Lutheran Book of Prayer**

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Dear Members of Christ Lutheran,

Pastor Measel and I pray that your Lenten experience with Christ and His word will deepen your faith and prayer life.

As each year passes I am moved to drink more deeply from the wellspring of life that is the Gospel of our Lord. I desire to know more of the depth of the riches and knowledge of God as revealed in Holy Scripture. Part of this journey is to learn more and more about prayer and conversation with God.

While it is true that even the simplest, sincere prayer of a Christian is heard such as in the cry of the ten lepers, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us" (Luke 17:13), it is also true that as we grow and mature in the faith, there comes a time to grow a mature in our prayer life. One common misconception is the notion that if prayer is sincere and heartfelt then nothing more is to be gained in learning to pray. Of course this is not true.

Once years ago and again recently, I was confronted by people who believe that praying the Lord's Prayer is an inadequate expression of our prayer life or an indication of thoughtlessness or carelessness in our prayers. However, Luther understood the priority of the Lord's Prayer in Christian devotion. In the Catechism, he introduces both his Morning and Evening Prayers with these words:

In the morning when you get up, make the sign of the holy cross and say: "In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." **Then, kneeling or standing, repeat the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. If you choose, you may also say this little prayer:**

One of these individuals declared, "Jesus only meant for the Lord's Prayer to be a model prayer but not to be used word for word." He then quoted Matthew 6:9 in which Jesus introduces the Lord's Prayer with these words, "Pray then like this:" Unfortunately this individual (no matter how well meaning) had neglected to carefully read his Bible. In Matthew Jesus introduces the Lord's Prayer to counteract heaping up "empty phrases as the Gentiles do" (Matt 6:7).

An even stronger indication that Jesus expects us to pray the Lord's Prayer is found in Luke. In Luke 6:1 one of Jesus' disciples recognizes his need to grow in his ability to pray and so he pleads with Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray." In response to this appeal, Jesus says, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name...'" Here Jesus clearly expects that this disciple and all of us will say the words of the prayer He has taught us.

May our Lenten services and sermons along with this devotion booklet help you to grow in your appreciation of our Savior and His love for us through His cross and resurrection. May they also serve as a catalyst to a deeper and more fervent prayer life for us all.

God's richest blessings in Christ,  
Pastor Philip Quardokus.

As you pray the prayers provided each day in this devotion booklet, please consider also praying the Lord's Prayer.

## Ash Wednesday

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." And he said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Luke 11:1-2

Martin Luther begins his discussion of prayer and the Lord's Prayer in the Large Catechism with these words:

"We have now heard what we must do and believe, in what things the best and happiest life consists. Now follows the third part, how we ought to pray. For we are in a situation where no person can perfectly keep the Ten Commandments, even though he has begun to believe. The devil with all his power, together with the world and our own flesh, resists our efforts. Therefore, nothing is more necessary than that we should continually turn towards God's ear, call upon Him, and pray to Him. We must pray that He would give, preserve, and increase faith in us and the fulfillment of the Ten Commandments [2 Thessalonians 1:3]. We pray that He would remove everything that is in our way and that opposes us in these matters. So that we might know what and how to pray, our Lord Christ has Himself taught us both the way and the words [Luke 11:1-4], as we shall see."

May we always pray in the way and with the words that please Jesus.

Prayer: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

## Thursday, March 6

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." Matthew 7:7

Luther continues in the Large Catechism, "Before we explain the Lord's Prayer part by part, it is most necessary first to encourage and stir people to prayer, as Christ and the apostles also have done."

I have arrived at a time in my life that I often qualify for a senior discount. (How did I get so old?) Some time ago when I was first offered a senior drink at a fast food restaurant, I was somewhat taken aback. Now whenever I have to pay admission or eat at a fast food place, I ask for a senior discount. It took me a while to get to this point. At first I found it embarrassing and a bit demeaning to ask but I soon discovered that a senior discount is seldom offered without asking.

Christians may be hesitant to go to God in prayer. We may either feel it is unnecessary or that we aren't important enough to be heard. Both of these notions are false. God does indeed know our needs before we ask (Matt 6:8), but He instructs us to ask. You never have to worry whether or not God wants to hear from you. He always does. To give you that confidence, He directs you to ask.

Likewise, you may sometimes be paralyzed by fear when coming before someone of immense authority and power (Think of the Cowardly Lion and the Great and Powerful Oz). At these times God wants you to know that He is your loving Father and you may come without fear to Him with all your needs.

***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.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, thank you for your overwhelming love for us in Jesus and His cross. Help me always remember that through my baptism, I have become your child and an heir of grace. Amen.

**Friday, March 7**

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Many of us who have grown up on the shores of Lake Michigan have a deep and abiding love of the water. I remember my parents taking me to our awe inspiring beaches—Cherry Beach, Warren Dunes, Weko Beach, Lion’s Beach and Silver Beach, just to name a few.

Of course as children we begged to go more often than we should have. Playing games in the waves and the sand was always a special treat. While learning to swim, we also learned to dive under the water.

My brothers and sisters would sometimes have competitions to see who could hold their breath the longest. 30 seconds, 45 seconds, 60 seconds and sometimes even longer. But sooner rather than later we would have to surface to catch a breath.

Prayer is like breathing. It is something that Christians must do. Just as it would be impossible to go for hours, days or weeks without breathing, so also would it be impossible for a Christian to go for hours, days or weeks without praying. Food, water and air are necessary for the life of our bodies. So also are Word, sacraments and prayer necessary for our spiritual life. Consciously or sometimes without even being totally aware, we all must pray without ceasing.

May this time of Lent be a special time for us to intentionally come to our loving Savior in prayer for He is the one who died for us and continually offers up prayers in our behalf.

Prayer: O Christ, the Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world. Have mercy on us and receive our prayers. Amen.

**Saturday, March 8**

O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. Psalm 139:1-2

We live in a time when words can circle the globe in a matter of moments. Hundreds and thousands of people can know the words we write on Facebook and Twitter. Conversations with distant friends and relatives are possible with smart phones and Skype.

In spite of all our communications devices, no one truly knows our thoughts. It is sometimes possible to smile and laugh when your heart is breaking. In the most difficult times, you can put a smile and your face and say everything is fine.

Yet with God no hidden thoughts are possible or necessary. He knows our every thought. It is the depth of God’s knowledge of our thoughts that makes the truth of God’s forgiveness in Christ so wonderful. There is no hiding the truth from God. It is the truth of your sin that moved Christ to go to the cross for you.

Now in Christ, it is a great comfort to understand that your thoughts are known to God. Your prayers can be elaborate or simple. They can be spoken in full voice or whispered. They can simply spring from your heart into your mind and God hears and answers.

Prayer: Lord you, you have searched me and have known me. Thank you for the wonderful gift of my beautiful Savior, who knows all my faults and failures and still brings my forgiveness and salvation. Amen.

**The First Sunday in Lent, March 9**

But (Jesus) answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Matt 4:4

Today the Gospel lesson recounts Jesus’ temptation and His response to the Devil. Our Lenten season is modeled on Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness following His baptism.

It may seem that after baptism and faith in Christ, spiritual life should become easy. Yet often just the opposite is true. During times of special spiritual devotions, it looks as though the Devil works overtime.

During the Divine Service distractions abound. In our personal devotions and prayers, it can be difficult to focus. During Lent when you are working harder to pray and read Holy Scriptures, Satan can make our days busier than ever.

Yet is especially during these times of trial that God’s word and prayer become the most helpful. God declares, “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me” (Ps 50:15).

In fact God may allow these troubles to come in order to help us refocus our priorities. How wonderful it is that God does not reject us because of our weakness in spiritual struggles but rather promises to hear and deliver us.

Luther writes in the Large Catechism: “We need to know this: all our shelter and protection rest in prayer alone. For we are far too weak to deal with the devil and all his power and followers who set themselves against us. They might easily crush us under their feet. Therefore, we must consider and take up those weapons with which Christians must be armed in order to stand against the devil.”

Prayer: Dear Lord, even Jesus was accosted by Satan and tempted to sin. When these temptations come our way, hear our prayers and bring us deliverance as you have promised. Amen.

## Monday, March 10

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Ps 19:14

Martin Luther had a variety of experiences with prayer before the Reformation. Not all of his experiences were good, right and proper. In the middle of a thunderstorm, rather than praying to the true God, he asked St. Anne for help. In the monastery, he was exposed to the useless repetition of prayers.

In the Large Catechism he writes, “Let this be said as encouragement, so that people may learn, first of all, to value prayer as something great and precious and to make a proper distinction between babbling and praying for something. For we by no means reject prayer. We reject the bare, useless howling and murmuring, as Christ Himself also rejects and prohibits long idle talk [Matthew 6:7].”

The Psalmist offers a wise prayer, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord.” While we ought not fear that our prayers do not live up to God’s standards when we cry for mercy, it is also important to remember that thoughtless babbling and repeating of meaningless mantras have no place in our prayer life.

May all of our Lenten prayers be offered in sincerity, kneeling before our crucified and risen Savior.

Prayer: O Lord, Jesus, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight. Thank you for hearing and answering my sincere cries for mercy. Amen.

## Tuesday, March 11

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. 1 John 3:1

And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living” Luke 15:11-13.

You may be familiar with these words. This is how Jesus begins the story of the Prodigal Son. Human relationships can be complicated and beyond explanation. Why would a son who had been given so much by his father abandon his father’s love? It is hard to know. Yet you may have seen this story play out over and over again in the lives of people around you.

Sons and daughters are cared for and loved. They are lavished with gifts from their parents and yet at some point human pride, the sinful world and temptation to evil overcome common sense and moral sensibilities.

Indeed one way or another, each of us has been prodigal in our own way. Some of us may have gone to extremes and others less so. Yet the comforting truth of this story is found in its conclusion: “While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.”

Every time we begin prayer with the words “Our Father, who art in heaven,” we can be sure of our Father’s love for the returning prodigal son or daughter. Let us never doubt the care and love that God has for his children when they return to him in repentance.

Prayer: Our Father in heaven let me always believe that You are my true Father and that I am Your true child, so that with all boldness and confidence I may ask You as dear children ask their dear father. Amen.

## Wednesday, March 12

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Matthew 6:9

Concerning this petition Luther writes in the Large Catechism:

“This is, indeed, somewhat difficult, and not expressed in good German. For in our mother tongue we would say, “Heavenly Father, help us in every way so that Your name may be holy.”

“But what does it mean to pray that His name may be holy? Is it not holy already?”

Answer, “Yes, it is always holy in its nature, but in our use it is not holy.” For God’s name was given to us when we became Christians and were baptized [Matthew 28:19]. So we are called God’s children and have the Sacraments, by which He connects us with Himself so that everything that belongs to God must serve for our use [Romans 8:16–17].

Now, here is a great need that we ought to be most concerned about. This name should have its proper honor; it should be valued holy and grand as the greatest treasure and holy thing that we have. As godly children we should pray that God’s name, which is already holy in heaven, may also be and remain holy with us upon earth and in all the world.

“But how does it become holy among us?”

Answer, as plainly as it can be said: “When both our doctrine and life are godly and Christian.” Since we call God our Father in this prayer, it is our duty always to act and behave ourselves as godly children, that He may not receive shame, but honor and praise from us.”

In the Small Catechism he writes:

What does this mean? God’s name is certainly holy in itself, but we pray in this petition that it may be kept holy among us also.

How is God’s name kept holy? God’s name is kept holy when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we, as the children of God, also lead holy lives according to it. Help us to do this, dear Father in heaven! But anyone who teaches or lives contrary to God’s Word profanes the name of God among us. Protect us from this, heavenly Father!

Prayer: Hallowed by Thy Name. Dear heavenly Father let me never say or do anything that would bring disrespect and disgrace to your holy Name. When I fail, bring me to repentance and grant me forgiveness for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

## Thursday, March 13

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Exodus 20:7

The use of language and tongue may be one of the greatest challenges for Christians seeking to live the Christian life. There was a time in our culture when profanity and vulgar speech was something that was recognized as wrong. It does appear today that foul language has become common even in what at one time we referred to as “polite company.” Not only do sailors talk like sailors but so do young and seemingly innocent boys and girls.

Of course foul and vulgar language is nothing new. It has been a problem through the ages. Still when we as Christians engage in this kind of talk, it does reflect poorly on our heavenly Father. Every family has a reputation that may or not have been earned or deserved. So also does the family of God. My prayer is that God’s family would not be demeaned through my language or actions.

Even worse than using vulgar speech is using God’s holy name in sinful and repulsive ways. When we pray, “Hallowed by Thy name,” may we again be reminded of the importance of proper speech in the family of God.

Nevertheless, we all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. It is important to remember during this Lenten season that Jesus went to the cross to pay for our misuse of His holy name. When we thoughtlessly take God’s name in vain, may we return to Jesus and hear him exclaim, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

Prayer: O Father in heaven, let your name be holy in my life and among my friends and family. When I fail to use my words the way I should, bring me to repentance and grant me forgiveness. Amen.

## Friday, March 14

Let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. Jeremiah 23:28

A big part of seminary education in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod is dedicated to helping future pastors speak God’s word faithfully. So it comes as a surprise to a young pastor that this skill is so little prized among some in his flock.

Pastors are frequently afflicted with comments such as “That’s just your opinion” or “It doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you are sincere or as long as you are a good person.” Trying to remain faithful to the whole counsel of God in our preaching and teaching can be a thankless job.

Yet faithfulness to God’s word is not only required of pastors but it is required of all Christians. When we pray for God’s name to be hallowed, we are praying that it would not be used for lying or inventions. We pray that in our midst no one would say, “God says,” when God does not in fact say such a thing.

Martin Luther writes in the Large Catechism: “We should pray against whatever opposes and persecutes our Gospel and pure doctrine and would suppress it.”

Luther understood, as we should as well, that for the Gospel to be rightly taught and believed is the most important task of the Church. Lent is particularly

a time to get the Gospel right as we see our Savior nailed to the cross for the sins of the world.

Prayer: O Father in Heaven, may our preaching and teaching always be faithful so that your name would be kept holy among us. Amen.

## Saturday, March 15

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. John 17:17

Today is the Ides of March. On this day in 44 B.C. Julius Caesar was assassinated as result of a conspiracy by many Roman senators. While this may seem to be a footnote of history, it also can teach a valuable lesson.

As we go through life, like Julius Caesar, it is possible to acquire a false sense of invincibility. This is a lie of Satan to keep us away from the truth of the Gospel. If in fact there is no such thing as sin and its consequence in hell, then there is no need for a Savior.

Satan’s chief tool is the lie. He lies to us and convinces us to lie to ourselves. For this reason Jesus prays in His High Priestly Prayer, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”

Our holy heavenly Father has given us His holy word for our benefit and blessing. May Jesus’ prayer be fulfilled during this Lenten season as we immerse ourselves in the word.

Let each detail of Jesus’ suffering and death remind us again of God’s great love for us.

Prayer: Lord, Your name is kept holy when Your word of truth fills us and strengthens our faith. Grant to us a hunger and thirst for your word and righteousness, now in Lent and always. Amen.

## The Second Sunday in Lent, March 16

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. John 3:16-17

This Lenten verse should always ring in our ears! “Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

God’s Name is kept holy when the truth of this verse is taught and believed! We must always fight the false notions that it is good works or giving money or a good character, etc. that brings eternal life.

You may remember that at Jesus’ crucifixion, the passing crowds and even the criminals crucified next to Him hurled insults at our dying Savior. This despicable behavior is hard to excuse. Yet every time someone proclaims or believes a plan of salvation other than the one described in this verse, they hurl insults at the dying Savior.

If there is another way to heaven than through the cross, then Jesus’ death was in vain and a squandering of Jesus’ precious blood. Let us keep God’s name holy by teaching the simple truth of Jesus’ words in John 3.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, let us never condemn ourselves by rejecting the simple and clear message of the Gospel. Grant us the joy of sharing in the

holiness of Your name for all eternity because of your only-begotten Son, given for us sinners. Amen.

### Monday, March 17

Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Matthew 5:16

This winter has been more extreme than most of us are accustomed to. With the wind and ice and snow many people across our country have had to endure days without electricity.

You may have experienced a time in your life when the power went out in the middle of the night and you hadn't prepared by placing a flash light next to your bed. Even your familiar house becomes strange and threatening in the depth of darkness that accompanies a power outage on an overcast or moonless night.

This will help you to imagine the spiritual darkness of the world that seeks to live without the light of Christ. Danger awaits every step.

Into this world of darkness God sent His Son to be the Light of the world. Unfortunately some will reject Jesus because they have been hurt or abused by those who claim to bear His name. God's name is not holy in the world when Christian people are rude, insulting, offensive or obnoxious.

Jesus has called upon us to let our light shine in the sin darkened world. Lent is not a time to hide our Gospel light under a bushel but it is a time to brightly illumine the forgiveness, life and salvation that Jesus won for us on the cross.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we pray that the world will see the holiness of Your name through the light that shines forth from the lives of your Christian people. Amen.

### Tuesday, March 18

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. Ephesians 4:1

Have you chosen to give up something for Lent? If you haven't, that's okay. However, many people do choose to exercise special discipline in their lives during the season of Lent.

One possible negative side effect of exercising special discipline in Lent is forgetting how necessary it is "to walk in a manner worthy" of Christ all year long. Praying, "Our Father, Who art in heaven, Hallowed by Thy name" all year round can serve as a reminder of the necessity of holy living for the sake of God's name.

In the Large Catechism, Luther writes, "We should pray for ourselves who have God's Word but are not thankful for it, nor live like we ought according to the Word. If you pray for this with your heart, you can be sure that it pleases God. For He will not hear anything more dear to Him than that His honor and praise is exalted above everything else and that His Word is taught in its purity and is considered precious and dear."

Prayer: Heavenly Father, grant to us your Holy Spirit that our lives would be worthy of our calling in Christ. Amen.

### Wednesday, March 19

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Matthew 6:9-10

Luther writes in the Large Catechism:

Just as God's name is holy in itself, and we still pray that it be holy among us, so also His kingdom comes of itself, without our prayer. Yet we still pray that it may come to us, that is, triumph among us and with us, so that we may be a part of those people among whom His name is hallowed and His kingdom prospers.

"But what is God's kingdom?"

Answer, "Nothing other than what we learned in the Creed: God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, into the world to redeem and deliver us from the devil's power [1 John 3:8]. He sent Him to bring us to Himself and to govern us as a King of righteousness, life, and salvation against sin, death, and an evil conscience. For this reason He has also given His Holy Spirit, who is to bring these things home to us by His holy Word and to illumine and strengthen us in the faith by His power."

We pray here in the first place that this may happen with us. We pray that His name may be so praised through God's holy Word and a Christian life that we who have accepted it may abide and daily grow in it, and that it may gain approval and acceptance among other people. We pray that it may go forth with power throughout the world [2 Thessalonians 3:1]. We pray that many may find entrance into the kingdom of grace [John 3:5], be made partakers of redemption [Colossians 1:12-14], and be led to it by the Holy Spirit [Romans 8:14], so that we may all together remain forever in the one kingdom now begun.

Prayer: Father gives us Your Holy Spirit, so that by Your grace we believe Your holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity. Amen.

### Thursday, March 20

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. John 3:5

God's kingdom is a marvelous thing. It is there for each of us to enjoy, yet it is impossible to break into. Our sinful nature creates an impenetrable barrier locking us in the kingdom of the world, the kingdom of death, the kingdom of Satan.

Yet there is a way into God's glorious kingdom. It is by the working of the Holy Spirit through word and sacraments. The Holy Spirit causes our old sinful self to die and our new Christ-like self to be born through the swirling waters of our baptism.

In the Small Catechism, Luther writes:

**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.

Prayer: Sin, disturb my soul no longer: I am baptized into Christ!

I have comfort even stronger: Jesus cleansing sacrifice. Amen.

*LSB Hymn 594 St. 2a*

### **Friday, March 21**

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. Matthew 28:19-20

In Luther's Large Catechism, we read:

"For the coming of God's kingdom to us happens in two ways: (a) here in time through the Word and faith [Matthew 13]; and (b) in eternity forever through revelation [Luke 19:11; 1 Peter 1:4-5]. Now we pray for both these things. We pray that the kingdom may come to those who are not yet in it, and, by daily growth that it may come to us who have received it, both now and hereafter in eternal life. All this is nothing other than saying, 'Dear Father, we pray, give us first Your Word, so that the Gospel may be preached properly throughout the world. Second, may the Gospel be received in faith and work and live in us, so that through the Word and the Holy Spirit's power [Romans 15:18-19], Your kingdom may triumph among us. And we pray that the devil's kingdom be put down [Luke 11:17-20], so that he may have no right or power over us [Luke 10:17-19; Colossians 1], until at last his power may be utterly destroyed. So sin, death, and hell shall be exterminated [Revelation 20:13-14]. Then we may live forever in perfect righteousness and blessedness' [Ephesians 4:12-13]."

Here Luther reminds us that "Thy Kingdom Come" is not only a prayer for personal blessings but it is also a great missionary prayer. Let us never begin to believe that Christ's Kingdom is only for us and not for everyone for whom Jesus died.

Prayer: Father in heaven, may your Holy Spirit work in the hearts of your people to produce a missionary zeal for those who do not yet know the love of our Savior and the gift of eternal life. Amen.

### **Saturday, March 22**

The Lord has established his throne in the heavens,  
and his kingdom rules over all. Ps 103:19

When we pray, "Thy kingdom come," it is important to remember that we are praying for Christ's kingdoms of Grace and Glory to come. We are asking that the Church would grow and that we would be a part of it in time and eternity.

Our Father also rules over His Kingdom of Power. Like it or not, every one and every thing is subject to God's reign in the universe and the laws of nature.

It is true that at times God chooses to temporarily suspend or change the laws of nature. We call those times "miracles." Jesus turned water into wine, calmed the sea, walked on water, and rose from the dead. Yet most often we are all bound by the natural laws of the universe that were established and are maintained by God.

Even unbelievers are bound by the laws of God's Kingdom of Power. The beauty of nature, the majesty of the universe, and complexity of our human bodies all testify to the power and wisdom of God.

Those who claim that there is no God simply ignore the overwhelming evidence for the Almighty. Yet in His power, His holiness and justice are also implied. Death is a reality in His Kingdom of Power.

May God's mighty power and awesome glory move us again to sincere thankfulness for the gift of His only-begotten Son who came to rescue us from the certainty of death.

Prayer: O Almighty God, as we see your majesty in nature, move us to seek your grace and mercy in the Gospel of Christ. Send your Holy Spirit into our hearts that we may grow in faith. Amen.

### **The Third Sunday in Lent, March 23**

Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. John 4:14

In our world there is much discussion about the gap between the rich and the poor, the have's and have not's. I suppose there are a variety of reasons for this. Some will point to the equity of financial rewards for those who work hard and take risks. Others will point to the inequity of exploitation and discrimination. One thing is sure in our sinful world, there will always be poor people. In fact Jesus tells us that the poor will be with us always (Mark 14:7).

While it is difficult to be financially challenged, there is even a more serious condition of poverty that affects the people of the world. There are those who do not have the water of life! It is too easy for us, even Christians, to be so focused on earthly wealth that we miss out on the heavenly treasures of forgiveness, life and salvation that Jesus won for us on the cross.

Concerning our prayer of "Thy kingdom come," Luther in the Large Catechism reminds us:

"From this you see that we do not pray here for a crust of bread or a temporal, perishable good. Instead, we pray for an eternal inestimable treasure and everything that God Himself possesses. This is far too great for any human heart to think about desiring, if God had not Himself commanded us to pray for the same. But because He is God, He also claims the honor of giving much more and more abundantly than anyone can understand [Ephesians 3:20]. He is like an eternal, unfailling fountain. The more it pours forth and overflows, the more it continues to give. God desires nothing more seriously from us than that we ask Him for much and great things. In fact, He is angry if we do not ask and pray confidently [Hebrews 4:16]."

Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven, in the midst of so many earthly distractions, help us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and our minds on things above. Amen.

## Monday, March 24

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” Mark 1:15

Among the many activities of Lent, repentance must always remain in the foreground. Jesus, John the Baptist and the Apostles all began their preaching with a call to repentance.

When the kingdom of God seems distant, we may tend to believe that we live in kingdoms created by our own desires and decisions. Living in these self-made kingdoms can soon become tiresome and dangerous.

Earthly pleasures soon give way to cries of “I’m bored.” Taking hold of life and claiming the responsibility of becoming a self-made and self-important man or woman can lead to self-destructive behaviors for those who are totally self-absorbed. We all must deal with the consequences of people who only look out for number one and care little for the lives and feelings of others.

Wars and rumors of wars abound throughout history. Thefts, carjackings, and muggings fill the news. The world is a dangerous place because of self-made kingdoms of selfishness and power.

When God’s kingdom breaks into this world wonderful things happen: “The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them” (Matthew 11:5).

Those who wish to enter this wonderful world of Christ’s kingdom are called to repent and believe the Gospel. May the Holy Spirit work repentance in our hearts so that we may always believe in our Savior and receive the blessings that He won for us on the cross.

Prayer: O Father in heaven, thank you for calling us out of the world of sin and darkness into your wonderful kingdom. Keep us safe and secure in the faith until we join you in eternity with all the saints in your heavenly kingdom. Amen.

## Tuesday, March 25

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Romans 14:17

“Shalom, my friend, Shalom” are the words of a song from my youth. In the 1960’s we sang this song with gusto and feeling. With a quick Google search I see that it is still around and even has a Youtube video!

Unfortunately, it wasn’t until I had been a pastor for many years that I began to actually understand the Biblical meaning of the word “Shalom” which we often translate as “peace.” A wise professor once advised that every pastor should make word studies a part of his sermon preparation. Following that advice one day, I took to examining this little word. On that day my way of thinking changed.

I discovered that in the Old Testament, shalom or peace is the condition that results from living in the Kingdom of God. This is the time when God reigns and all of His enemies are defeated. This is the time when the paradise of Eden is restored and righteousness is fully experienced by all. When a believer says,

“Peace (shalom) be with you,” he means I want you to have all of the blessings of living in the time when God fully and completely reigns in righteousness and joy.

This time will be completely and fully upon us in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. It begins now when we enter God’s kingdom through Holy Baptism. It is made real for us by Jesus life, death and resurrection so that we may receive the blessing He won for us on the cross. Shalom is a short hand way of praying for God’s kingdom to come in all of its fullness.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, send us your Spirit that He may grant to us the righteousness, peace and joy of living in your kingdom. Amen.

## Wednesday, March 26

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:9-10

Here are some of Luther’s thoughts from the Large Catechism regarding “Thy will be done:”

“If we would be Christians, therefore, we must surely expect and count on having the devil with all his angels and the world as our enemies [Matthew 25:41; Revelation 12:9]. They will bring every possible misfortune and grief upon us. For where God’s Word is preached, accepted, or believed and produces fruit, there the holy cross cannot be missing [Acts 14:22]. And let no one think that he shall have peace [Matthew 10:34]. He must risk whatever he has upon earth—possessions, honor, house and estate, wife and children, body and life. Now, this hurts our flesh and the old Adam [Ephesians 4:22]. The test is to be steadfast and to suffer with patience [James 5:7–8] in whatever way we are assaulted, and to let go whatever is taken from us [1 Peter 2:20–21].

So there is just as great a need, as in all the other petitions, that we pray without ceasing, ‘Dear Father, Your will be done, not the devil’s will or our enemies’ or anything that would persecute and suppress Your holy Word or hinder Your kingdom. Grant that we may bear with patience and overcome whatever is to be endured because of Your Word and kingdom, so that our poor flesh may not yield or fall away because of weakness or sluggishness.’”

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, we live in a world where Your will seems neglected and rejected. Strengthen us in faith that we would learn to love your holy will and seek for it to be fulfilled among us. Amen.

## Thursday, March 27

You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you. Deuteronomy 4:2

Determining God’s will in our daily lives can be both difficult and easy. It can be difficult if you listen to television, radio or internet preachers who pretend to have special messages from God. Who can you believe? They seem

always to be finding things that are new and unusual. It can be difficult to know whom we are to trust.

Likewise there are many religious people who claim that the Bible is old fashioned and that much of what it says is no longer appropriate for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. God's plan for marriage is prejudiced and irrelevant. The miracles are myths written for a pre-scientific era. We no longer need all the baggage that the Bible brings to the table. It's difficult to know which parts of the Bible should be tossed out as superstition.

Trying to sort through all these opinions can be difficult. But it can also be easy, if we remember that God tells us not to add to what He has commanded and not to take away from it either.

God's will is revealed in His holy word as contained in the Bible. It tells us all He wants us to know about His love for us in Christ. It tells us of forgiveness, faith and life. God has not kept secret His will but freely shares it with all who are willing to believe.

Prayer: Father, send Your Holy Spirit into our hearts so that we may know and believe your will as revealed to us in the Bible. Help us to see that the entire Bible points to the cross of Christ, our Savior. Amen.

### Friday, March 28

For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”  
John 6:40

Luther's Small Catechism reads:

**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.

I have heard silly questions asked by well meaning Christians. Here are a couple examples of those types of silly questions, “I wonder if it is God's will for me today to shop at Walmart or Meijer.” “Is it God's will for me to wear green or red today.” (I admit that I'm making those questions up, but they represent the kinds of things that some Christians fret over.)

God has given us perfect freedom to make decisions in our lives when choosing between none sinful activities. Some decisions may exhibit a greater or lesser degree of wisdom, but we are free to choose without worrying if we are violating God's will.

However, it is never God's will for us to sin! I have actually heard this type of faulty logic: “God wants me to be happy! I can only be happy if I break a promise or commitment that I've made, therefore God wants me to be unfaithful to my promises.”

What is God's good and perfect will for you? It is God's will for you to believe in His Son and receive eternal life and be raised on the last day! Thy will be done!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus into the world to be my Savior. Thank you that in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus struggled with the prospect of the cross, He declared, “Not my will but Thine be done.” Amen.

### Saturday, March 29

(God) desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.  
1 Timothy 2:4

Some years ago I met a man whose language was so foul I knew that he couldn't possibly be a Christian and that there was no hope that he ever would be! But here comes the rest of the story.

A few years later I found myself serving as chairman of a community mental health committee and as it turned out, this man's wife was the secretary of the committee. This committee met more or less regularly and through this work I became acquainted with her. As is so often the case, she was the polar opposite of her husband. She was soft spoken and very religious. I learned that she even was an officer in her church.

Unfortunately as time passed, she discovered that her church supported abortion. In her professional life she was a nurse and worked with mothers and their young children. She could not accept the fact that the church she had so avidly supported would now take a stand that refused to support the rights of unborn babies.

She was determined to find another church. Since I had worked with her on this committee in our community, she confided all this in me. She then told me that in her search for a new church that she would start with the Lutheran church. I explained to her our process of adult instruction. We didn't want someone to join our church only to find out some months or years later that our teachings are something that they found objectionable.

Then the first miracle happened. She convinced her husband to attend classes with her. Yes, this is the same man who in my opinion would never be a Christian. I must admit that I approached those first classes with more than a little anxiety.

The second miracle came when at the end of the course of instruction both she and her husband chose to be confirmed! Not only that, they eventually became counselors for a Lutheran summer camp!

Some time in the process this woman came to me and exclaimed, “If I would have known what becoming a Lutheran would do for my husband, I would have joined your church long ago.”

Lesson learned! Never give up on a loved one or friend who seems to be a hopeless case. God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven, may your will be done in our lives and in the lives of those we love. May the word of Christ's grace and forgiveness touch the lives of people around me. Amen.

## Sunday, March 30

(Jesus said,) “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”  
John 9:5

Those who do not know God and His will are condemned to wander around in the dark. The sin darkened world is a dangerous place. People who are ignorant of God’s word or reject it make decisions that have both temporal and lasting consequences.

From Genesis to Revelation God has revealed to us the spiritual reality behind all that we see. Still, I am often surprised by the number of Christian people who chose to be among those who are ignorant of God’s word.

Over and over again I learn of the anguish of Christian parents whose children have decided that they know more than God about running their lives. Their parents pray fervently that their children would not suffer irreparable harm because of their willful disobedience.

Fortunately, it is never too late to repent and believe the Gospel. God’s Holy Spirit is willing to do what Luther calls His “alien work.” It is the work of bringing sin to light. When God sent the prophet Nathan to David, it was to bring David to repentance. He had been willfully living in the darkness of his adultery and murder. To this Nathan declares: “You are the man!” (Read 2 Samuel 12).

Nathan next declares God’s judgment upon David. Then David, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is brought to repentance and restored to faith! Thanks be to God that Nathan had the privilege of announcing to David God’s forgiveness and the Holy Spirit was able to His proper work of producing faith.

In response to this event David writes: “I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,’ and you forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Psalm 32:5).

May the light of Christ and His word shine into our hearts. Where we have failed to live according to God’s will, may His word bring us to repentance. When we have come to repentance, may His mercy abound more as the light of the Gospel of forgiveness penetrates our sin darkened hearts.

Prayer: O heavenly Father, cause the light of your word to penetrate our souls so that the Holy Spirit may work there to bring us to repentance and faith. Amen.

## Monday, March 31

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8

Our grandson loves to play hide and seek. He especially likes it when his father jumps out of his hiding place and surprises him. Our grandson squeals with glee.

He loves the excitement of the chase and the thrill of the surprise. But as we get older we learn that not all surprises are so benign. There are forces at work in the world that have nothing but an evil intent.

Growing up in this sin filled world, we soon learn the wisdom of avoiding dark alleys. Criminals and evil of every kind seek to do us harm.

The worst adversary is the devil. All of his work is contrary to the will of God. While God’s ultimate will for you is to be saved eternally, Satan’s ultimate will for you is to die eternally in hell.

Since we live in such dangerous times, St. Peter directs us to be sober-minded and watchful. God gives us His word as a guide and guard for our lives. He knows that as soon as we stray from the path laid out for us by His holy law, we will fall pray to the fangs of the roaring lion who seeks to devour us.

But have no fear:

**Though devils all the world should fill,  
All eager to devour us.  
We tremble not, we fear no ill,  
They shall not overpower us.  
This world's prince may still  
Scowl fierce as he will,  
He can harm us none,  
He's judged; the deed is done;  
One little word can fell him.**

A Mighty Fortress is Our God, stanza 3

When Christ uttered the word from the cross, “It is finished,” He declared Satan defeated for all time. Rest secure in the loving arms of your Savior, Jesus.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, your will was that Jesus would defeat the devil for us on the cross. Keep us in the true faith that through His life, death and resurrection, we will join you forever in the life of the world to come. Amen.

## Tuesday, April 1

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Philippians 1:21

Today is April Fool’s Day! What joy we had in our youth poking fun at the gullibility of others. “Mom, have you seen the snow outside” (Wait, that may happen with the winter we’ve experienced this year. <wink, wink>) “Hello, is this the zoo? May I speak with Mr. Fox?” Ha ha, those jokes were great fun.

April Fool’s jokes are based on the ability to trick people into believing that something obviously false is indeed real. Most of the time this is harmless fun—but not always.

Some tricks can be hurtful, cruel and dangerous. The most hurtful, cruel and dangerous tricks come when we play fast and loose with our spiritual lives. The Devil, the world and our own sinful selves try to fool us into believing that sin is a game.

St. Paul wants Christians to know reality. Our lives on earth will one day come to an end. But until that time, “For to me to live is Christ.” When God’s will is done in our lives, Christ is shown to the people around us. When we are trustworthy and true, people learn that Jesus is also trustworthy and true. When we are caring and helpful, people learn the Jesus is caring and helpful.

One of the great benefits of being a Christian is knowing that God has a plan for you. We may not always know the details of that plan but we do know that plan and purpose is to live as Christ in the world.

We also know that when we have completed the tasks laid out for us, there awaits the perfect joy and bliss of heaven. For me to live is Christ and “to die is gain!” How wonderful it is to know that this is God’s ultimate will for us!

Prayer: Our Father, Who art in heaven, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

### Wednesday, April 2

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread  
Matthew 6:9-11

Luther’s Large Catechism:

Give us this day our daily bread.

Here, now, we consider the poor breadbasket, the necessities of our body and of the temporal life. It is a brief and simple word, but it has a very wide scope. For when you mention and pray for daily bread, you pray for everything that is necessary in order to have and enjoy daily bread. On the other hand, you also pray against everything that interferes with it. Therefore, you must open wide and extend your thoughts not only to the oven or the flour bin, but also to the distant field and the entire land, which bears and brings to us daily bread and every sort of nourishment. For if God did not cause food to grow and He did not bless and preserve it in the field, we could never take bread from the oven or have any to set upon the table.

To sum things up, this petition includes everything that belongs to our entire life in the world, for we need daily bread because of life alone. It is not only necessary for our life that our body have food and clothes and other necessities. It is also necessary that we spend our days in peace and quiet among the people with whom we live and have dealings in daily business and conversation and all sorts of doings [1 Thessalonians 4:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:12; 1 Timothy 2:2]. In short, this petition applies both to the household and also to the neighborly or civil relationship and government. Where these two things are hindered so that they do not prosper as they should, the necessities of life also are hindered. Ultimately, life cannot be maintained. There is, indeed, the greatest need to pray for earthly authority and government. By them, most of all, God preserves for us our daily bread and all the comforts of this life. Though we have received from God all good things in abundance, we are not able to keep any of them or use them in security and happiness if He did not give us a permanent and peaceful government. For where there are dissension, strife, and war, there the daily bread is already taken away or is at least hindered.

Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven, in addition to our salvation in Christ, You have given us life, health and so much more, we pray that you will continue to grant to us all that we need to support this body and life. Amen.

### Thursday, April 3

The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.  
You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.  
Psalm 145:15-16

#### Give us this day our daily bread.

*What does this mean?* God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.

*What is meant by daily bread?* Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.

The Psalmist reminds us that every living thing depends on God. From the smallest creature to the largest whale, God provides sustenance for all of their needs. Unfortunately many people live like animals without recognizing God’s hand behind every blessing.

Through Christ and His cross we recognize the depth of God’s love for us. It is our prayer that we would also recognize that love in all that He provides for the support of our bodies.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, cause our eyes to look to you for every good and blessing of body and soul. Amen.

### Friday, April 4

In him we live and move and have our being. Acts 17:28

In 1875 William Ernest Henley wrote the poem that we have come to know as *Invictus*. Its final stanza reads:

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.

These words have inspired many, yet they are misleading. While it is true that God gives us a free will to make choices concerning things below us, we are totally dependent upon God for everything that is good.

Paul Speratus in the hymn “Salvation Unto Us Has Come” speaks this reality. The third stanza begins:

It was a false, misleading dream  
That God His Law had given  
That sinners could themselves redeem  
And by their works gain heaven.

Indeed this great hymn says it all in the first two lines.

**Salvation unto us has come  
By God's free grace and favor;**

Without God's daily blessings of body and soul, I would be nothing other than the captain of the sinking ship of my soul.

Prayer: Father in heaven, let me always recognize that I have my existence in You for you have created me, body and soul, and you sustain me every day with the bread of life. Amen.

**Saturday, April 5**

Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,  
for his steadfast love endures forever! Psalm 106:1

My earliest memories include praying before each meal. The common table prayer has become part of the fabric of my being. It warms my heart now to see my grandchildren also learning the words of this dear prayer.

In some homes and when I was growing up, the children were required to sit at the table until they were excused. In the evening, especially during Advent and Lent, the meal concluded with our family devotions. As we were excused we would pray Psalm 106:1. We called this event, "Returning thanks!"

How appropriate it is to pray before and after meals! We seek God's blessing upon our food and thank him for these great gifts.

Martin Luther included this form for our dinner prayers in the Small Catechism:

**Asking a Blessing**

*The children and members of the household shall go to the table reverently, fold their hands, and say:*

The eyes of all look to You, [O Lord,] and You give them their food at the proper time. You open Your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. [Ps. 145:15–16]

*Then shall be said the Lord's Prayer and the following:*

Lord God, heavenly Father, bless us and these Your gifts which we receive from Your bountiful goodness, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

**Returning Thanks**

*Also, after eating, they shall, in like manner, reverently and with folded hands say:*

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His love endures forever. [He] gives food to every creature. He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call. His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor His delight in the legs of a man; the Lord delights in those who fear Him, who put their hope in His unfailing love. [Ps. 136:1, 25; 147:9–11]

*Then shall be said the Lord's Prayer and the following:*

We thank You, Lord God, heavenly Father, for all Your benefits, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

It certainly would be a wholesome practice to pray the Lord's Prayer before and after each of our meals as Luther suggests.

Prayer: We thank You, Lord God, heavenly Father, for all Your benefits, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

**The Fifth Sunday in Lent, April 6**

"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."  
John 11:25-26

Mary and Martha were grieving at the death of their beloved brother, Lazarus. Their grief so touched Jesus that he also wept (John 11:35).

It may seem strange that Jesus would cry at the death of a loved one, especially since He knew that in a few moments He would raise Lazarus from the dead. The simple act of weeping recorded in these words reminds us that God never intended for us to die but that sin has destroyed the perfection of creation.

Our bodies need constant nourishment to survive and so God provides us with our daily bread. Yet even with the steady supply of food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, and goods—our earthly bodies will succumb to the wages of sin!

When we pray for our daily bread, it is also always important to look past it to the gift of life in Christ. The fullness of God's blessings will be realized on the Day of Resurrection!

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, You have given us life and sustained it. We thank you that in Christ you have given us eternal life and the promise of the Resurrection. Amen.

**Monday, April 7**

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Matthew 6:33

Priorities, Priorities, Priorities! You may have noticed that in all the petitions of the Lord's Prayer, this is the only one that prays for physical blessings! All of the others pray for spiritual blessings. It seems like it would be good to remember that ratio in our prayers.

It is easy to get caught up in the foolishness of the rat race of higher income and more "stuff." This relentless pursuit of wealth can easily distract us from the importance of knowing our sin and our Savior's grace.

When we pray, "Give us our daily bread," it is a reminder to look to the Children of Israel wandering in the wilderness. Every day their daily bread was waiting for them on the ground in the form of manna.

Trusting God to give us all that we need to support this body and life frees us to look first to His kingdom and His righteousness. We know that His gracious love will supply all of our needs.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me keep my priorities in order. Grant me forgiveness where I have placed the pursuit of physical blessings over the pursuit of your kingdom and righteousness. Amen.

### Tuesday, April 8

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. Hebrews 13:16

If God has given you the privilege of raising children, you know how difficult it can be to teach them to share. Even though a child may have a box full of toys, it is difficult for them to see a little brother or sister play with one of “their toys.” It may be a constant struggle to teach little ones to share but in the end it is worth the effort.

Of course the bigger problem is teaching each of us adults to share. We work hard for our money and letting it out of our grip is a difficult spiritual challenge.

Recognizing that all we have comes from God can help in the matter of learning to share. Not only has He given us all that we have, He can also take it away. We only are in charge of our wealth for a short period of time.

Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief. This gift of forgiveness and life is the greatest gift that we can share with the people around us.

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank you for the abundant gifts and blessings that we have received from Your hand. Move us to be blessings to those around us who are in need so that they will praise Your gracious goodness. Amen.

### Wednesday, April 9

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. Matthew 6:9-12

Luther writes in the Large Catechism:

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

This part now applies to our poor miserable life. Although we have and believe God’s Word, do and submit to His will, and are supported by His gifts and blessings, our life is still not sinless. We still stumble daily and transgress because we live in the world among people. They do us much harm and give us reasons for impatience, anger, revenge, and such. Besides, we have the devil at our back. He attacks us from every side and fights—as we have heard—against all the previous petitions. So it is not possible to stand firm at all times in such a constant conflict.

There is here again great need for us to call upon God and to pray, “Dear Father, forgive us our trespasses.” It is not as though He did not forgive sin without and even before our prayer. (He has given us the Gospel, in which is pure forgiveness before we prayed or ever thought about it [Romans 5:8].) But the purpose of this prayer is that we may recognize and receive such forgiveness. The flesh in which we daily live is of such a nature that it neither trusts nor believes God [Romans 7:14–18]. It is ever active in evil lusts and

devices, so that we sin daily in word and deed [Genesis 6:5], by what we do and fail to do [James 2:15–16]. 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.

Prayer: Our Father, Who art in heaven, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Amen.

### Thursday, April 10

Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper,  
but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy. Proverbs 28:13

In Luther’s Small Catechism we read:

**Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.**

*What does this mean?* 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.

One of the greatest dangers for Christians is a feeling of self-righteousness and smugness. Jesus reminds us in the Lord’s Prayer that our lives are full of sin. If God in Christ forgives us this multitude of offenses against Him, how can we not forgive the few injustices that are committed against us?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach us to humble ourselves before the cross and receive forgiveness and mercy. Make us eager to share that forgiveness with the people around us. Amen.

### Friday, April 11

Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Psalm 19:12 NIV

I was sitting at one of those lunch counters shaped like a narrow horseshoe where the food was served from the middle but you could look across at the people sitting on the other side who were looking back at you.

As I sat there, I struck up a conversation with a woman and a man who were sitting across from me. All three of us were strangers to each other and shared the usual chit chat of those who are meeting for the first time.

The man directly across from me had a long flowing black beard. I could tell that he must be on his way to some important meeting or event. He was impeccably dressed and every hair on his head (including his beard) was perfectly in place. His face looked like it had been recently scrubbed with intense vigor.

Soon our food was served! I can’t remember what I had that day but I can clearly remember what the man with the beard was served! Halfway through our meal I looked up and saw that he had soft egg yolk streaming down his beard!!! It was one of those situations where it was hard not to stare. I had to keep looking back. Needless to say, it somewhat spoiled my breakfast.

What to do? I didn't know this man and neither did the woman sitting next to him (who was spared the frontal assault of an egg stained beard).

I knew that someone would surely tell him about the egg on his face but I must report that I did not have that privilege. To this day, I hope that he went into the restroom and looked in the mirror before his important encounter that he had so carefully prepared for.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you know my heart. You know all of my sins even the ones that I am not aware of. Grant me forgiveness for all of these sins for Christ's sake. Amen.

### **Saturday, April 12**

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! Psalm 51:1-2

Luther says in his Large Catechism:

But this should serve God's purpose of breaking our pride and keeping us humble. God has reserved this right for Himself: if anyone wants to boast of his godliness and despise others, that person is to think about himself and place this prayer before his eyes. He will find that he is no better than others [Romans 12:3] and that in God's presence all must tuck their tails and be glad that they can gain forgiveness. Let no one think that as long as he lives here he can reach such a position that he will not need such forgiveness [1 John 1:8]. In short, if God does not forgive without stopping, we are lost.

It is, therefore, the intent of this petition that God would not regard our sins and hold up to us what we daily deserve. But we pray that He would deal graciously with us and forgive, as He has promised, and so grant us a joyful and confident conscience to stand before Him in prayer [Hebrews 10:22]. For where the heart is not in a right relationship with God, or cannot take such confidence, it will not dare to pray anymore. Such a confident and joyful heart can spring from nothing else than the certain knowledge of the forgiveness of sin [Psalm 32:1-2; Romans 4:7-8].

Prayer: Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love. Amen.

### **Palm Sunday, April 13**

So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" John 12:13

Our prayers can also contain praise. On the day of Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem (the day we call Palm Sunday), the crowds offered wonderful praise to Jesus: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!"

Yet we know that they did not fully comprehend who Jesus was, what He would do, or what kind of king He was. They seemed to be more interested in political salvation than spiritual salvation.

This is a trap that is easy for Christians to fall into. We know right and wrong because God has revealed it to us in Sacred Scripture. Because we live in

a democracy, we also have a voice in our government. It is important that we never let our enthusiasm for politics overwhelm our priorities in such a way that we neglect to see our real needs.

Praying for God to forgive our trespasses reminds us that our real need is not for a political savior but for a Savior who would die on the cross for the sins of the world. When we shout "Hosanna!" (Save, now!), we know we are calling on Jesus to forgive us our sins and grant us life and salvation. We know that we will live under the Blessed King of Israel for all eternity in heaven.

Prayer: King Jesus, as we lay our coats and branches before you let us recognize you as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Amen.

### **Monday, April 14**

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. Matthew 18:21-22

Luther concludes his thoughts on this petition in the Large Catechism with the following:

There is here attached a necessary, yet comforting addition: "As we forgive." He has promised that we shall be sure that everything is forgiven and pardoned, in the way that we also forgive our neighbor. Just as we daily sin much against God, and yet He forgives everything through grace, so we, too, must ever forgive our neighbor who does us injury, violence, and wrong, shows malice toward us, and so on. If, therefore, you do not forgive, then do not think that God forgives you [Matthew 18:23-25]. But if you forgive, you have this comfort and assurance, that you are forgiven in heaven. This is not because of your forgiving. For God forgives freely and without condition, out of pure grace, because He has so promised, as the Gospel teaches. But God says this in order that He may establish forgiveness as our confirmation and assurance, as a sign alongside of the promise, which agrees with this prayer in Luke 6:37, "Forgive, and you will be forgiven." Therefore, Christ also repeats it soon after the Lord's Prayer, and says in Matthew 6:14, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you," and so on.

This sign is therefore attached to this petition. When we pray, we remember the promise and think, "Dear Father, for this reason I come and pray for You to forgive me, not so that I can make satisfaction or can merit anything by my works. I pray because You have promised and attached the seal to this prayer that I should be as sure about it as though I had Absolution pronounced by You Yourself." For Baptism and the Lord's Supper—appointed as outward signs—work as seals [Ephesians 1:13]. In the same way also, this sign can serve to confirm our consciences and cause them to rejoice. It is especially given for this purpose, so that we may use and practice forgiveness every hour, as a thing that we have with us at all times.

Prayer: Our Father, Who art in heaven, grant me a forgiving heart. Amen.

## Tuesday, April 15

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:32

In my youth television was replete with dramas known as “Westerns.” Most any night of the week you could watch cowboys riding into town with their six-shooters.

One theme that recurred in many of these Westerns was that of a newcomer who came into town naïve about the ways of the Wild West. He would make foolish mistakes or be gullible about simple things that were well known to the “Old Hands.” These naïve, gullible people were given the moniker: Tenderfoot!

No one wanted to be a tenderfoot. It indicated that you didn’t know much about anything.

Sometimes a tenderfoot would try to start a ranch in the most inappropriate place. He would have dreams and visions that were well beyond reality. When the seasoned westerners discussed this tenderfoot and his outlandish ideas, he would be described as soft-in-the-head!

Unfortunately, in a sin hardened world, Christians who seek to be kind, tenderhearted and forgiving are sometimes thought to be naïve tenderfoots who are soft-in-the-head. In many areas of life, being hardhearted and pragmatic is simply the way things are done.

How sad it is when this is also true in the Church. How wonderful it is when the people of God come together and are kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgives!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, give me a tender heart for Christ’s sake. Amen.

## Wednesday, April 16

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, Matthew 6:9-13

Luther writes in the Large Catechism:

And lead us not into temptation.

We have now heard enough about what toil and labor is needed to keep all that we pray for and to persevere. This, however, is not done without weakness and stumbling. Although we have received forgiveness and a good conscience and are entirely acquitted, yet our life is of such a nature that we stand today, and tomorrow we fall [Isaiah 40:6–8]. Therefore, even though we are godly now and stand before God with a good conscience, we must pray again that He would not allow us to fall again and yield to trials and temptations.

Temptation, however, or (as our Saxons in olden times used to call it) *Bekörunge*, is of three kinds: of the flesh, of the world, and of the devil. For 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 [Galatians 5:19–21; Colossians 3:5–8]. In short, the old Adam encourages us to have all kinds of evil lusts, which cling to us by nature and to which we are moved by the society, the

example, and what we hear and see of other people. They often wound and inflame even an innocent heart.

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. No one is willing to be the least. Everyone desires to sit at the head of the group and to be seen before all [Luke 14:7–11].

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 both God’s Word and works. He tears us away from faith, hope, and love [1 Corinthians 13:13], and he brings us into misbelief, false security, and stubbornness. Or, on the other hand, he leads us to despair, denial of God, blasphemy, and innumerable other shocking things. These are snares and nets [2 Timothy 2:26], indeed, real fiery darts that are shot like poison into the heart, not by flesh and blood, but by the devil [Ephesians 6:12, 16].

Prayer: Heavenly Father, as I struggle against the devil, the world and my own sinful nature, strengthen me by your Spirit that I may resist the temptation to sin. Strengthen and preserve me in the true faith. Amen.

## Maundy Thursday, April 17

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Mark 14:38

Luther’s Small Catechism:

**Lead us not into temptation.**

*What does this mean?* 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.

Since the devil, the world, and our sinful nature continually tempt us to sin, God has provided means for us to be strengthened against this onslaught. Those means are the word and sacraments.

One of the greatest temptations of Satan is his attempt to have us doubt God’s love and grace. Therefore, in God’s holy word we learn—Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: “Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me.”

In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”

Luther asks this question: *What is the benefit of this eating and drinking?*

He answers this way: These words, “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,” show us that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and

salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for giving your very body and blood on the cross for my salvation. Strengthen me with your word and Spirit when I receive this body and blood in, with and under the bread and wine at your holy table. Amen.

### **Good Friday, April 18**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Matthew 6:9-13

Luther writes in the Large Catechism:

But deliver us from evil. Amen.

In the Greek text this petition reads, “Deliver or preserve us from the evil one,” or “the hateful one.” It looks like Jesus was speaking about the devil, like He would summarize every petition in one. So the entire substance of all our prayer is directed against our chief enemy. For it is he who hinders among us everything that we pray for: God’s name or honor, God’s kingdom and will, our daily bread, a cheerful good conscience, and so forth.

Therefore, we finally sum it all up and say, “Dear Father, grant that we be rid of all these disasters.” But there is also included in this petition whatever evil may happen to us under the devil’s kingdom: poverty, shame, death, and, in short, all the agonizing misery and heartache of which there is such an unnumbered multitude on the earth. Since the devil is not only a liar, but also a murderer [John 8:44], he constantly seeks our life. He wreaks his vengeance whenever he can afflict our bodies with misfortune and harm. Therefore, it happens that he often breaks men’s necks or drives them to insanity, drowns some, and moves many to commit suicide and to many other terrible disasters [e.g., Mark 9:17–22]. So there is nothing for us to do upon earth but to pray against this archenemy without stopping. For unless God preserved us, we would not be safe from this enemy even for an hour.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, preserve and protect us from all evil, especially the Evil One. Grant that we may rest secure in your love and grace for Jesus sake. Amen.

### **Holy Saturday, April 19**

The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore. Psalm 121:7-8

Luther’s Small Catechism:

**But deliver us from evil.**

*What does this mean?* We pray in this petition, in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.

Every hour in our lives is important. Think of the very first hour. Imagine the pride and excitement that your parents must have experienced as they held their tiny child in their hands for the first time.

Think of the hour when you were received into the family of God through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Imagine the joy among the angels in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7).

For most of us there have been many hours that have passed since those hours that began our earthly and eternal life. Yet it is true that another hour awaits us all, our last hour. What we have done with all the hours of our lives will take on different meaning then. All that is worldly will be meaningless and only that which comes from Christ will remain valuable.

God’s ultimate will for you is to welcome you to His eternal mansions when your last hour arrives. He has worked everything out in your life so that you would hear the Gospel and believe that He sent His only Son to die on the cross for your sins. He has sent the Holy Spirit to bring you to that faith and keep you in the faith. He will graciously take you from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we live in an overwhelmingly evil world where sin and death are on every hand. Preserve us from that evil now and when the time is right bring us to yourself in heaven for Christ’s sake. Amen.

### **The Resurrection of Our Lord, April 20**

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. John 20:1

Our walk through Lent with the Lord’s Prayer ends with the joyful celebration of the Resurrection of Our Lord. In Jesus and His resurrection God declares His “Amen” to all of our prayers.

In the Small Catechism we read: This means that I should be certain that these petitions are pleasing to our Father in heaven, and are heard by Him; for He Himself has commanded us to pray in this way and has promised to hear us. Amen, amen means “yes, yes, it shall be so.”

**Thine the amen Thine the praise  
Alleluias angels raise**

**Thine the life eternally  
Thine the promise let there be  
Thine the vision Thine the tree  
All the earth on bended knee  
Gone the nailing gone the railing  
Gone the pleading gone the cry  
Gone the sighing gone the dying what was loss lifted high.**

**Thine the glory in the night  
No more dying only light  
Thine the river Thine the tree**

**Then the Lamb eternally  
Then the holy holy holy  
Celebration jubilee  
Thine the splendor Thine the brightness only Thee only Thee.**

**Thine the amen Thine the praise  
Alleluias angels raise**

Selected from  
*Thine The Amen, Thine The Praise*  
by Herbert F. Brokering

Prayer: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.