

PRAYER

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We are here a Christian assembly gathered in the house of God. God's house is a house of prayer. This assembly would not be a Christian assembly if it did not also engage in prayer. We commence our sessions with prayer, we close them with prayer. We pray for God's blessing, His guidance, and for wisdom. We thank Him for His goodness, for all success that attends our efforts. We all feel instinctively that without prayer we could not be doing the work of God.

Since, then, prayer is such an essential thing in our Christianity, we shall do well to spend a little time in considering and learning what in His Word God tells us about prayer, so that we may pray in a manner acceptable to Him. Prayer, therefore, has been chosen as the subject for the doctrinal part of this convention. In dealing with this subject we shall proceed on the lines as followed by our catechism. In the first place we shall ask

What Is Prayer?

Many definitions of prayer may be found. A dictionary may say that prayer is a solemn petition for benefits, addressed to the Supreme Being. Or we may read this definition: "Prayer is an act of supplication to a divinity, especially to the true God." Bible dictionaries are more concise. Cruden's Concordance tells us that prayer is "the offering up of our desires to God for things lovely and needful with the humble confidence to obtain them through the mediation of Christ." Another one says that prayer is the lifting up of the heart unto God. The following are definitions found in Lutheran books of catechetical instruction: "Prayer is a service in which we not only call upon the true God in faith through our Mediator Christ, in order to obtain all those good things that we stand in need of, but also to offer praise and thanks for the good things we have received." Zorn defines prayer as follows: "To pray means that we as children of God take all our troubles to our heavenly Father and lay them before Him, as children on earth take all their problems to their father and their mother." The definition given in our catechism is probably as concise and comprehensive as we could wish. It reads: "Prayer is an act of worship wherein we with hearts and lips bring our petitions before God, and offer up praise and thanks to Him."

Prayer is an act of worship. There are also other acts of worship, but prayer is the primary, the chief, the fundamental one. To worship God is to call upon Him, to pray to Him. The words, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God," can only mean, Thou shalt call upon Him in prayer. As it is natural to the human heart to know that there is a Supreme Being, so also it is natural to the human heart to call upon Him in danger and trouble. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" - these words mean simply that whosoever shall worship Jehovah shall have a place in heaven.

And so throughout the Bible the people of God are represented as a praying people, as people who bow their knees in worship to their Creator. When at the end of Genesis 4 we read, "Then (in the days of Enos) began men to call upon the name of the Lord," that must not be taken to mean that previously, for the first few hundred years of the existence of man, no one had thought of such a thing as calling upon the name of the Lord in prayer. When Abel brought his offering to the Lord, he must surely have combined some word of prayer with that act of worship. The words quoted from Gen. 4 may be translated, "In those days men began to proclaim the name of the Lord." (These words are frequently used in Genesis to refer to public preaching of the Word of God, GLW) When in the days preceding the Flood God saw that the wickedness of men was great in the earth and that men resisted the Spirit of God, it was just this that He saw, namely, that men did not deign

to call upon the Most High in prayer. Noah, on the other hand, is described as a just and perfect man, that is, he led a life of prayer before God. The sweet savour that arose to heaven from Noah's sacrifice after he left the ark must surely have been the prayer of Noah indicated by the rising smoke of the sacrifice. And so on. Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets and the great unnamed multitude of the people of God of the Old Testament were such as called upon the name of God in prayer.

And so also the people of God of the New Testament are those who bow their knee unto the Father of their Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus left us an example of a prayerful life. We are told that He spent much of His time in prayer. And those who would be followers of Jesus must follow the example He set. His every act was sanctified by prayer. He prayed as He stood in the Jordan River about to be baptized. After a hard day's work of preaching and healing He took a short night's rest and in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out and departed into a solitary place and prayed. Before He engaged in the important work of choosing His twelve apostles, He spent the night in prayer. He prayed on the mount of transfiguration when that great change in appearance came over Him. He prayed before multiplying the loaves and fishes. Often, before performing His miracles He looked up to heaven and raised His voice to His father in prayer. We know how, just before He went to the cross on Calvary, He prayed not only for His disciples but also for all those who through their word would believe in Him. And we know also how He prayed whilst hanging on the cross. How, then, could any man be a follower of Jesus, a Christian, if he did not spend some time in prayer. By this it was to be manifest to Ananias of Damascus that Saul Of Tarsus had embraced the Christian faith, in the street called Straight he would find him praying. Prayer is the pulse-beat of spiritual life. A man is found lying on the road. Is he dead or is there still life in him? A doctor proceeds to feel his pulse. If the pulse is still perceptible, he is not yet dead. A man claims to be a Christian. Is he really one? The criterion to be applied is this, Does he pray? If he tells us that he does not believe in praying and practises no praying, he is not a Christian. The Lord does not recognize him as one.

Prayer is an act of worship. But those who worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth. Prayer must proceed from the heart. Hence David prays, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer." The Lord looks to the heart. The Lord looks to the heart also when we are saying our prayers. Merely to repeat the words of a prayer is not praying. A parrot might be taught to repeat the words, "Lord, bless us," but you could not say that the bird was praying. You might have a gramophone record with the Lord's Prayer as said by some eminent divine, but when you put it on your gramophone you could not say that the machine is praying. And yet, how often are Christians just like a bird or like a gramophone when saying their prayers. How often has not the Lord to lay this charge against them. "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me." Shakespeare is right when he has one of his characters say with regard to his prayers, "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below; words without thoughts never to heaven go." Merely to repeat the words of a prayer, or to sing them in public worship, while the heart is occupied otherwise, is mockery. The Second Commandment says, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord Thy God in vain." It is taking the name of the Lord in vain if we pretend to be praying, although having no intention of holding communion with God. It is pure hypocrisy. Rome may say that as long as you get the prayers off of your lips, you will get credit in heaven for the numbers of prayers you have said. Hence the use of the beads in praying. Say a prayer for each bead on the string, and if you want to do particularly well, go around the string a few times. But that is not much different from the praying mill used by the monks in Tibet. Instead of a string of beads they have a cylinder with written prayers attached to it. A handle turns the cylinder and each revolution offers the prayers affixed to it to the gods. So if he has turned the handle for half an hour the Tibetan has repeated his prayers a goodly number of times and hopes his gods should be duly impressed. Of such a manner of praying our Lord says, "While ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking." The prophets of Baal kept yelling from morning till late in the afternoon, "Baal, hear us! Baal, hear us!" But there was neither voice nor any to answer. It is not the much speaking that makes the prayer. No,

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Uttered or unexpressed:
The motion of a hidden fire

That trembles in the breast.

Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of an eye,
When none but God is near.

Is it sufficient, then, when in danger or tribulation, to harbour the desire in the heart that help might come from above? No, of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaketh. It is true, as the psalmist says, that God hears the desire of the humble, and hence His promise that before they call He will answer, and while they are yet speaking He will hear. But David asks the Lord to receive not only the "meditation of his heart" but also the "words of his mouth." Some people say they never say prayers, they deem that unnecessary, because the Lord knows the desire of their heart. But wherever the Word of God shows us praying people, it shows us them as people lifting up their voices unto the Lord. Nevertheless, the dumb man or one whose tongue has been paralysed is not debarred from praying. His heart may cry unto the Lord. There is also the silent prayer, although therein, too, the mind will frame the sentences in which the thoughts express themselves.

There are especially three matters on which the Christian should desire to hold conversation with his God. In his prayer he brings before God his petitions, his praises, and his thanks. The petition is that form of prayer in which we ask God for something. In the Lord's Prayer we have seven petitions, that is, seven requests are made to God, seven things we ask Him for. The prayers of some people consist only of petitions. They pray only when they have requirements they want God to fill. But so many model prayers recorded for us in the Bible and so much instruction with regard to prayer given there show us that our prayers should also be praises and giving of thanks. It has rightly been said that if you know of nothing else to pray about, think of all the blessings you enjoy day by day, and tell God how much you appreciate them. To praise God is to extol His goodness and greatness. With such praises God is well pleased. It pleases parents when their children tell them how highly they think of them and how much they appreciate all that their parents have done for them. And our Father in heaven assures us that it pleases Him when His children show forth His praise. The angels in heaven do that, and we whom the Lord has redeemed at so great a price have much more reason for doing it. We should not be slothful in proclaiming the honour of our God. And in their prayers Christians must not forget to sound a note of gratitude. We do not like ungrateful people, and God does not like them either. If we have done someone a good turn, possibly at some expense to ourselves, we do not think much of him if he accepts our kind services without a word of acknowledgement. That is God's complaint against the heathen, they failed to thank Him. What then if His children simply accept His mercies and blessings with never a word of gratitude to the Giver of all good gifts? But even when we do give thanks unto God we are obliged to say with the poet,

Weak is the effort of my heart,
And cold my warmest thought,
But when I see Thee as Thou art,
I'll praise Thee as I ought.

Why Should We Pray?

Prayer, then, is an act of worship wherein with heart and voice we bring before God our petitions, our praises, and our thanks. And this act of worship we engage in, in the first place, because God has commanded it. Our Creator wants to be worshipped. He wants to hear our prayers. He says, "Call upon me in the day of trouble." Jesus says, "Ask!" St. Paul bids us pray without ceasing. He exhorts that first of all supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made. He tells Timothy to see to it that men everywhere pray, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting.

In the second place, we should be encouraged to pray by the promise given us by our Father in heaven that He will hear our prayer. He not only says, "Call upon me in the day of trouble," but also adds, "And I will deliver thee." Jesus declares that when we ask, it shall be given unto us. Just such promises of God were the motive

power of David's prayers as we read them in the psalms. "O thou that hearest prayer," he says, "unto thee shall all flesh come." It is just this lack of confidence in God's willingness to hear their prayers that so often makes Christians neglect the sweet hour of prayer. Although the Lord has promised, "It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer: and while they are yet speaking, I will hear," our old stubborn heart often says, What will prayer avail! What's the use of praying! Does God really care? Will He take any notice of my requests? To such littleness of faith God replies in the 145th Psalm: "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them."

But is it really true that God hears and answers prayers? We often hear Christians complain that their prayers have been in vain. Their experience in this direction has led them to doubt whether God really means what He says when He promises to hear His children's prayers. On some occasion they very insistently asked God for something they believed themselves to be in dire need of, but apparently the petition was not granted, and so they boldly assert that prayer is not efficacious. They think the Epistle of James is wrong when it is said there, "Ye have not because ye ask not." They see no meaning in the words of the same epistle that the "effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." But are such people honest in their conclusions? Were there not times also within their experience when God did give them what they asked for in their prayer? And have not other Christians been able to tell them of very remarkable answers they had to their prayers? St. Paul, too, might have complained that prayer was in vain when feeling that thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan who buffeted him, he solemnly on three special occasions approached the Lord in prayer asking for the removal of this disability, whatever it may have been. The burden was not taken from him, but the reply of the Lord was, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." But Paul has no such complaint against God to make. He had taken his trouble to the Lord in prayer and left it to the Lord to deliver him in His own time in His own way. God hears His children when they cry to Him, always hears them, but in His wisdom does not always give them exactly that what they ask for. Just as earthly parents often for their children's good have to refuse their requests, so our Father in heaven knows best what is good for us and what fits in with the way in which He wishes to lead us through life, and notwithstanding our pleadings, withholds from us the things we have been asking for. And perhaps what we know not now we shall know hereafter. Many a Christian has admitted that he had much reason to thank God for not having given him that for which he was at one time praying.

The mother of St. Augustine, Monica, was a very pious woman. Her husband was not a Christian. And her son followed in the footsteps of the father. Though it did not seem of much use to speak to these two about God, this lady incessantly pleaded with God for their conversion. When Augustine planned to undertake a journey to Rome, Monica trembled at the thought of the evil influences the life of this great and wicked city would have on her son, and she besought the Lord to prevent his journeying thither. The prayer was not granted. Augustine went to Rome. But whilst in Rome he came under good Christian influence which brought him to the conviction of the dangers of heathenism and the truth of Christianity. In consequence of that journey to Rome, which Monica would like to have prevented, the Church received one of the greatest teachers of that period. In the end Monica was not disappointed because her petition had not been granted. Perhaps many of us, too, have had reason to thank God because at some time or other He withheld from us the thing we were asking for and gave us something far better instead.

The reasons why apparently prayers often go unanswered are several. The promise of God to hear prayer is certainly conditional. St. John tells us to have this confidence in Him that if we ask anything "according to his will," He will hear us (1 John 5: 14). Our prayers are not always according to God's will. The mother of the two disciples James and John probably thought she was making quite a legitimate request to Jesus when she besought Him that, when His kingdom would be established, the two highest posts of honour might be given to her two sons, but Jesus had to rebuff her, telling her that her request was foolish. The leper who came to Jesus said, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." He did not demand unconditionally that the Lord should restore him to health. He made his petition subject to the Lord's will. He would be a happy man if he could regain his health. But God's ways were higher than his ways, and he was unable to know the intentions of the Lord. The Lord would know best. Let the Lord's will be done. Therefore he says, "If thou wilt," if it is in accordance with what Thy wisdom has planned for me, if it should redound to Thy glory and my good, then in

Thy almighty power grant me recovery from this disease. So also Jesus Himself set us the example when He prayed in Gethsemane, saying, "Father, if it be possible ... Not my will, but thine, be done." God hears the prayers of His children, but not always in the way the children expect it to be done. And then, too, to test the faith and the patience of the children He sometimes lets them wait a while. The Syrophenician woman who came to Jesus pleading for her daughter was very insistent in her prayer. It seemed for a while as though her petition were falling on deaf ears. At first the Lord seemed to ignore her. Then He told her that He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and, therefore, had no time for her, a Gentile woman, and that it was not the proper thing to take the bread from the children and throw it to the dogs. But all this was merely a trial of her faith. In the end the Lord could say to her, "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." What a fine example this woman has set us. From her we may learn not to despair if it looks as if God were turning a deaf ear to our prayer, but simply to go on praying, yea, to wrestle with God in prayer, to remind Him, as it were, of His promises, to bring before Him our arguments as though we were bent on convincing Him.

It is sometimes argued that to pray is illogical since God's decrees cannot be altered by man's prayers. The fatalist may say, What is to be will be, whether I pray or not. He might as well say, I will live to the age that God has decreed to me whether I eat or not. Christians do not speak like that. Although they know that their times are in God's hands and that He has allotted to them the years of pilgrimage they are to have on earth, yet they take every reasonable precaution to live according to the rules of health and do not unnecessarily jeopardize their lives. So also God not only foreknows, He moulds our destinies, but in moulding them He also considers our prayers which He has also foreknown. Therefore, in the day of trouble we do not sit idly down and say, We shall wait and see what the Lord has decreed for us, but besides using every reasonable means we know of to overcome our trouble we call upon God for His help. There is nothing illogical in that.

Again it is argued that God cannot answer every prayer, because so often prayers are contradictory. John Smith would like to have rain and he asks the Lord to open the windows of heaven and send down a copious supply of moisture. But his neighbour, Fred Mueller, is not yet ready for rain. Part of his harvest is still out in the field. He would like to see a continuance of fine dry weather and he asks the Lord for more days of warm sunshine. Both men are good Christians and God has promised them both that when they ask it shall be given; now which one is the Lord to please? It is suggested that at times such contradictory requests made by His children must place the Lord in a rather awkward dilemma. We heard this argument frequently in connection with the war. So-called Christian nations were wrapped in deadly warfare with each other. From both sides prayers were ascending to the throne of God asking for victory in the struggle. Both sides were able to back up their prayers by very sound arguments, at least so they thought. Each side thought it could make an appeal to the righteousness of God and ask that the enemy be vanquished. It is suggested that if God had been really impartial, He would have made the war end in a draw. Since He did not do that, He must have gone back on His promises as far as His children on the losing side were concerned. People argue in that way in order to make the Christian teaching of the efficacy of prayer look ridiculous. They do not see how ridiculous they are making themselves by using arguments of that kind. They depict the Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, as a vacillating dullard who is swayed by popular opinion and desires in making His decisions. Christians believe that the Lord God omnipotent rules over all things in heaven and earth and that He, therefore, is the God of Battles who decides the issues when nation rises up against nation. "The Lord wrought a great victory," we are told in the account of David's wars with the Philistines. And St. Paul tells the Athenians that He who made of one blood all nations for to dwell on all the face of the earth has "determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation." Humanly speaking the rise and fall of kingdoms and their boundaries are decided by wars. Yet in those wars is the finger of God moulding the history of the world. And in the affairs of His government the Almighty does not require the advice of men. Nevertheless, also in time of war the children of God take their trouble to the Lord in prayer. And if there are children of God, true Christians, on both of the warring sides, in each case seeking and praying for the welfare of their country and for victory, that will not present any difficulties to the King of kings. In each case, as such prayers are, or should be, conditional prayers, the spirit of the prayer will be that if it please the Lord, if it be good for the nation, if it serve for the building of His kingdom, He would ward off defeat and bring the war to a conclusion that would enable His children throughout the affected nations to lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. Christians will in time of war offer up such prayers in all humility, acknowledging the war as a

righteous retribution from on high for their country's sins, and will not base their request on their country's assumed righteousness, but solely on the love and mercy of God and will acknowledge that if their nation is going to suffer defeat, they are but receiving the due reward of their deeds. If, on the other hand, the Lord grants a victorious conclusion of the war, Christians will not be puffed up with pride. To claim that the Lord grants victory to the side that is in the right, and to accept victory as proof that the cause for which the nation was fighting was a just one betrays abysmal spiritual ignorance. Not only the Word of God but also the records of the world's history tell us that it is not always the righteous cause that gains the victory on the battle fields. At the present time Christians everywhere are fervently praying that God would prevent a World War No. 3, yet when it comes, they will humble themselves under the almighty hand of God and say, "The will of the Lord be done; let Him do whatsoever seemeth Him good."

Times of war are times of trouble. And the Lord bids us call upon Him in the day of trouble. It is just because His children are often so slow and too stubborn to bow the knee in humble supplication that the Lord sends days of trouble. Troubles come into our life, they come into our families, they come into our country, and often their purpose is to take the stiffness out of our knees. Many a one has only then learnt to pray fervently and become instant in prayer and to call to God out of the depths when heavy clouds lowered over him. Those who do not love and fear God will probably in days of trouble only resort to rebellion against the Almighty and will blaspheme Him. Cursing will come from their lips instead of prayers. To them the words of the prophet apply: "Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return" (Jer 5: 3). Nevertheless, there have been cases innumerable, possibly also within our own experience, in which the day of trouble has led men and women to seek the Lord and to find the way that leads to life eternal.

Not only should our own troubles be the burden of our prayers. Our prayers are not to be a display of selfishness and self-interest. Our prayers should reveal our universal concern for and our love of mankind. We are told of the old Scotchman who used to say in his daily prayer: "God bless me and my wife and our John and his wife, us four and no more." I am afraid that often our prayers lack that love and concern for others that marks the true Christian. Just in our prayers also we are to bear one another's burdens. We know how cheering and strengthening it is to the Christian when he knows and is assured that others are praying for him.

These, then, are the reasons why we should pray: God wants us to pray; God has promised to hear us when we pray; our own troubles and those of others should urge us to pray. Let us allow Luther to give us a word of admonition here. In reply to the question why we should pray he answers: "In the first place we should be urged by God's commandment who so earnestly commands us to pray. Then His promise to hear us. In the third place that we consider our needs and misery that weigh heavily upon us and make the prayer necessary in which we pour out our troubles before Him in accordance with His command and promise. Fourthly that in accord with God's Word and promise we pray in true faith and be confident that He will hear us. And we do it in the name of Jesus through whom our prayers are acceptable to God who grants us mercy and every blessing for Jesus' sake."

To Whom Should We Pray?

Prayer is an act of worship. Whom are men to worship? Him who says, "I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt have no other gods before me." As Christians we heed the words of Jesus. "Thou shalt worship the Lord, thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." That means that we should pray to no other deity than to Him who has revealed Himself in His Word, who has spoken to men through Jesus Christ, the world's Redeemer, who has declared Himself to be God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. This is the God whom we worship in the Christian Church. Only those who honour the Son and receive Him as their Redeemer worship God. For "all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him."

The heathen pray to other gods. Those who are not of the household of God, not members of that great family in heaven and earth of which He is the Father, not believers in the blood which cleanses us from all sin, are not able to pray to God. Their so-called prayers are an abomination to Him. He has no pleasure in them. Without

faith it is impossible to please God. Even when praying, Paul declares that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils and not to God (1 Cor 10: 20). And that refers also to the sacrifices of the lips. When the priests of Baal called upon their god, there was no god to hear. It is as the 115th Psalm says of the gods of the heathen. "They are the work of men's hands." More often they are productions of his brains, conceptions of his warped mind. "They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: they have ears, but they hear not. They that make them are like unto them: so is everyone that trusteth in them." When, therefore, men pray to a diety who is not the Truine God of the Bible, whether this be done by the pagan people of China or Japan, or whether it be done in the midst of Christendom by such as deny the Trinity, deny that Jesus is the true God begotten of the Father from eternity, as is done by Unitarians and Modernists, or in modern lodge worship, such prayer is not only useless, it provokes God to anger. In masonic lodges they utter this prayer: "Supreme Architect of universal nature, who by Thy almighty word didst speak into being the stupendous arch of heaven and for the instruction and pleasure of Thy rational creatures didst adorn us with greater and lesser lights thereby magnifying Thy power and endearing Thy goodness into the hearts of men, we humbly adore and worship Thy unspeakable perfection. Teach us, we pray Thee, the true love of Thy great, mighty, and terrible name. Inspire us with a firm and unshaken resolution in our virtuous pursuits. Give us grace diligently to search Thy word in the book of nature wherein the duties of our high vocation are inculcated with divine authority. May the solemnity of the ceremonies of our institution be duly impressed on our minds and have a happy and lasting effect on our lives." The prayer is not addressed to the God of the Scriptures, but to some imaginary "Architect of the Universe." It asks not for enlightenment through the written Word but through the book of nature. But the book of nature, though it declares to us the majesty and almighty power of God, tells us nothing of Christ crucified and, therefore, cannot make us wise unto salvation. Any religious or semi-religious society that ignores the cross of Calvary is outside of the pale of Christianity, and its worship, so also its prayers, are pagan.

It is also nothing short of gross idolatry when the Roman papacy addresses its prayers to saints and angels and to the Virgin Mary. Here are a few samples of such prayers as we find them in the Roman Catechism. After Mass the priest and the people are to pray together in a loud voice: "Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope, to thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve, to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn, then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us; and after this our exile show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus, O clement, O pious, O sweet Virgin Mary. Pray for us, O holy mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promise of Christ." In a further prayer connected with the same ceremony the people are taught to say: "Blessed Michael, Archangel, defend us in the hour of conflict, be our safeguard against the wickedness and snares of the devil," etc. Concerning such prayers we ask in the first place whether angels and saints are present to hear our prayers. Omnipresence, as also omniscience, belongs to God alone. Are those that have reached the home above conscious of what is going on on earth? It is the Lord only who looks down from heaven and beholds the children of men. To Him Isaiah says, "Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not; thou, O Lord, art our father, our redeemer" (Isa 63: 16). We do not doubt that both Abraham and Mary are with God in heaven. It is useless, therefore, to address prayers to them. And even if they could hear, what help could they render? But above all, when we are warned not to worship the creature instead of the Creator, but to worship Jehovah and to serve Him only, that settles the matter for us that prayers to saints and angels are nothing short of gross idolatry and an abomination to God.

Romanists may tell us that they do not worship Mary, but only adore her. However, what is the difference? The word "adore," from the Latin "ad," to, and "oro," I pray, means to pray to, to worship. Although the word may often be used in a figurative sense, as when we say that a mother adores her child, in Rome's worship it is used in its literal sense.

Our prayers may be directed to the Truine God as such or to any individual person of the Trinity. Jesus prayed to the Father, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." If Jesus is worthy to receive worship from the angels in heaven, then surely men should not hesitate to worship Him. The modernist, who denies the diety of Jesus, deprecates the idea of offering up prayers to Him, and yet does not refrain from joining in when others are singing, "Jesus, Lover of my soul, let me to Thy bosom fly." Although it would be difficult to quote from the Scriptures a prayer addressed specifically to the Third Person of the Godhead, yet the Church has from the

earliest times not found it inconsistent to pray in these or similar words, "Come, Holy Ghost and Lord, be now Thy graces all outpoured."

For What Should We Pray?

Some say they do not pray because they have no requirements. What a very poor life theirs must be. Requirements? Is not our life full of needs and requirements? Are we not constantly requiring things that the grace and goodness of God must supply? We have need if we would reach the life eternal. We need temporal and we need spiritual blessings. The leper asking Jesus to cleanse him of his awful disease was asking for a temporal blessing. The publican who prayed, "God be merciful to me a sinner," was praying for a spiritual blessing. Jesus once said to His disciples, "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." That did not mean that He was giving them an open cheque on heaven that they could fill in to any amount they desired. He asks for faith in connection with their prayer, and the prayer of faith is always one that conforms to God's will. Such a prayer will ask for temporal blessings conditionally, "Lord, if Thou wilt." And so also in asking for such spiritual blessings as are not necessary unto salvation, the prayer will be a conditional one. A Christian may wish that God would give him a special gift of eloquence, so that by powerful reasoning he might easily be able to stop the mouths of those who oppose God's truth. It would be quite in order to ask for such a gift, but it would need to be a conditional prayer. Another may desire to hold a special office in the congregation. It is quite right to ask God to grant him that. Yet, although it is something spiritual he is asking for, it must be a conditional prayer. But when we pray, "Lord keep us steadfast in the faith unto the end that we may enter the kingdom prepared for us," there is no need to say there, "Not my will, but Thine be done," because God has told us it is His holy will that we should continue in the faith unto the end. In our catechism we learn that in prayer we may ask for "everything that tends to the glory of God and to our own and our neighbour's welfare, both spiritual and temporal blessings." For "such spiritual blessings as are necessary for our salvation we should ask without condition; all other gifts, with the condition that God would grant them to us if they tend to His glory and our welfare." We may not always express the condition when saying a prayer, but in that spirit our prayers for temporal gifts must be offered up.

Praying in the Name of Jesus

It has already been said that the only prayer acceptable to the Most High is that offered up in the name of Jesus. "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." What does it mean to ask the Father in the name of Jesus? It means simply that when we pray we have the firm confidence that our prayers are acceptable to the Father because we have been redeemed through the blood of Jesus Christ. Sin is rebellion against God. Sinners are rebels. Have rebels any right to petition the king? Will the king be pleased to receive a request for favours from such as do not want him to reign over them? Will not the king turn a deaf ear to their petitions? So also we are of ourselves not worthy of the things for which we pray. We are by nature enemies of God. But through our Redeemer Jesus Christ we are under the grace and goodwill of God. And for His dear Son's sake He hears our prayer and grants our petitions. And when we offer up our prayer in that spirit we are praying in the name of Jesus. The Christian's prayer is always a prayer in the name of Jesus, although the name of the Redeemer may not be mentioned in his prayer, as, for instance, it is not mentioned in the Lord's Prayer. When the Christian prays at table, "The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing," he has, it is true, not mentioned the name of Jesus. Nevertheless, inasmuch as he believes that his prayers are acceptable to God for Jesus' sake, he is praying in the name of Jesus. At the same time it is fit and proper that we state at the end or beginning of our prayer that we are asking this in the name of Jesus. Most of our collects, the short prayers used in our liturgical service, therefore close with the words "Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord," or similar words. We thereby indicate that we are asking this in the name of Jesus.

For Whom Should We Pray?

It has already been said that our prayers must not betray a spirit of selfishness in us. Our Lord teaches us to embrace our fellow-Christians in our prayers when He says we should pray. "Our Father, give us our daily bread, forgive us our trespasses," etc. St. Paul bids us make supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of

thanks for all men (1 Tim 2: 1). Naturally, in the first place, it will be our own troubles that will bring us upon our knees. The leper asks that he might be made clean; the publican in the parable asks that God be merciful to him; the thief on the cross asks he might be given a place in paradise; St. Paul was asking for himself when he besought the Lord to take away the thorn in the flesh that hindered him in his work. On the other hand, the Syrophenician woman had a request to make on behalf of her daughter who was grievously vexed by a devil; Jesus prayed for His disciples, He prayed specially for Peter asking that his faith not fail in the hour of crisis. And when Peter had been cast into prison by Herod and was lying under sentence of death, on the eve of his execution a band of Christians was gathered in the home of Mary, the mother of Mark, making intercession for him; Abraham prayed fervently for Lot and the preservation of Sodom. So also in our church prayers we say, "Bestow Thy grace upon all the nations of the earth; especially do we entreat Thee to bless our land and all its inhabitants." We ask the Lord that everywhere men might be led to the knowledge of the Saviour.

Yet, as in doing good to all men, we are especially to consider them who are of the household of faith, so in our prayers we specially remember those who are our brethren in faith. In His high priestly prayer Jesus prayed not only for His disciples but also for those who through their word would believe in Him, that is, for all Christians throughout the ages to come. St. Paul assures all those to whom his epistles are addressed that he remembers them in his prayers. He also asks his hearers to pray for him. He felt he needed their prayers and would be much helped by them. In answer to their prayers as well as his own the Lord would give him the necessary wisdom and strength to carry on the great work of the evangelization of the world. Especially in the chaos and confusion prevailing amongst those who are called Christians to-day, and in view of the great danger of the many wolves in sheep's clothing, the Church needs our prayers to-day, the prayer that the Lord would preserve unto us His Word in its truth and purity, the prayer that He would keep us from strife and schisms, the prayer that He would wake up those who in the lukewarm spirit of indifference are in danger of losing the faith and thereby losing their souls, the prayer that the Lord would heal the divisions which are keeping Christians in opposing camps and are retarding their missionary endeavours, and the prayer that the Lord would come soon to make the Church Militant the Church Triumphant.

St. Paul bids us especially remember those in our prayers who sit in seats of government, kings and all in authority, and adds that "this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour." Kings and those in authority may not always be very estimable people. They may not always be very kindly disposed towards the Christian faith. All the more are they in need of our prayers. For after all, as we read in the Book of Proverbs, the heart of the king, and that means of all our legislators in general are "in the hand of the Lord, as rivers of water; he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Prov 21: 1). If we prayed more for those in authority, we should probably find less reason for complaint against, and adverse criticism of, our governments. We do well to say in our General Prayer: "Grant also health and prosperity to all that are in authority, especially to His Majesty our King, to the Governor and Legislatures of this Commonwealth and of this State and to all our judges and magistrates. Endue them with grace to rule after Thy good pleasure to the maintenance of righteousness and the hindrance and punishment of wickedness, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."

And let us not forget that we are required to pray also for our enemies. "Pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven." That is one of the outstanding principles of Christianity. It is just this Christian virtue that has been so arresting to many. It is true that just because of the practice of this virtue Christians have often been accounted fools. Yet, herein Jesus set them the example. He prayed for His executioners, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." And the first martyr of the Christian Church, Stephen, followed the example of Jesus when he prayed for those who stood ready to hurl their death-dealing boulders upon him, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." And so we do well to say in our prayers, "May it please Thee to turn the hearts of our enemies and adversaries, that they may cease their enmity and be inclined to walk with us in meekness and in peace."

Should we also pray for those who have departed this life? We know the Romanists do that. Rome's ceremony of the mass is based on the assumption that the prayers of Christians can induce God to liberate out of purgatory those confined there to expiate sins for which they had failed to make sufficient reparation in this life. In the Roman Catholic confession of faith as accepted by the Council of Trent in the year 1562 this is especially

emphasized. In the Roman Catechism the people are taught to say, "I firmly believe that there is a purgatory and that the souls therein detained are helped by the prayers of the faithful." Also in the Anglican Church prayers for the departed are heard. But if we believe that it is given unto men once to die and after this the judgement, then what purpose can prayers for the departed serve? Jesus tells us of two men who lived and died. The one, a poor man named Lazarus, was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The other, a rich man, when he died, found himself in hell. Did Lazarus have any need of intercessions on his behalf? Could intercessions make the rich man's torments any easier? The practice of praying for the dead is inextricably connected with, and dependent on, a belief in a purgatory or some intermediate state. But the Bible knows nothing of any intermediate state. "If the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be" (Eccl 11: 3).

As the tree falls, so will it lie,
 As the man lives, so will he die,
 And as he dies, so will he be
 All through the days of eternity.

Lutheran theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have been unanimous in their rejection of any form of prayers for the dead. We do have, however, what we call a Commendatory Prayer to be used at a deathbed. Our Liturgy makes provision for such a prayer. "If the pastor be present when a person's earthly life is drawing to a close, he shall lay his hands on the dying one as he breathes his last and say a few words of farewell and benediction to him on this wise: Go forth, Christian soul, in the name of God the Father, who so gloriously created thee in His image. Go forth in the name of God the Son, who has bought thee with a price and has redeemed thee with His bitter sufferings and death. Go forth in the name of the Holy Ghost, who sanctified thee to be His temple. May the God of all mercy who caused Lazarus to be carried into Abraham's bosom and the thief on the cross to enter paradise keep thee from the power of the evil one ... and take thee into His eternal home, etc. When death has ensued, all may kneel and pray thus: We thank Thee, Lord Jesus Christ, Thou Prince of Life, for having kept our brother in true repentance and faith unto his blessed end. Into Thy hands we commend his spirit in its homeward flight. He is now being gathered unto his people, etc." In the prayers at our funeral services we thank God for all the blessings enjoyed by the departed and pray that the remains which we are committing to the grave may be kept against the day of the glorious resurrection. That, of course, can not be termed praying for the dead.

A Few More Questions in Connection with Prayer

There are a few questions in connection with prayer that I should still like briefly to deal with.

Where should we pray? God is omnipresent and is, therefore, present everywhere to hear our prayer. Prayers said at Rome or at Jerusalem are no more effective than the prayers we offer up in our homes. Jonah prayed in the belly of the whale, and the Lord heard his prayer. Paul prayed in prison and the Lord was there to hear his prayer. The apostle says, "I will (I desire) therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath or doubting" (1 Tim 2: 8). But that does not exclude that we have special places for prayer. The house of God is to be a house of prayer. We go to church to pray. With a silent prayer we take our seats. The hymns we sing are mostly prayers and should be offered up as such. The collects and other prayers in which the pastor leads us must be the expressions of our own hearts. Often churches are left open throughout the week for worshippers to come in whenever they please to hold communion with God in prayer. But not only when we go to the house of God are our lips to be opened in prayer. The Christian should lead a daily life of prayer. There are our prayers in the home, our family altars, our daily devotions, in which we allow God to speak to us in His Word whilst we give answer in our prayers. There are our table prayers, our grace before meat and, I hope the good old custom is still observed in our homes, returning thanks after the meal. Family devotions and table prayers should not be dispensed with on account of strangers, un-Christian people, who may happen to be visiting us.

And then, too, each member of the family has his or her own private prayer which he is wont to perform in privacy. Jesus often went up into a mountain to pray, for there He would be undisturbed, there He would be

alone with God. And He had some very scathing remarks to make about the Pharisees who loved to show off with their prayers, performing them in the open street where they would be seen of men. Jesus says, "Pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

Must our prayers be framed in words of our own, or may we use a prayer-book? Some say to read a prayer is not praying. In some instances it may not be. It will depend how it is read. Why should we, however, not pray in words that others have framed for us? Are not the psalms written for us as model prayers to be used by us as such? Are not most of our hymns prayers in words suggested by others? When praying in the family circle it may be safest to use a prayer-book. Not everyone has the necessary command of language to be able to offer up a prayer suitable to the requirements of all. He may mispronounce words, or use incorrect grammar, and his prayer becomes ludicrous. It may, therefore, be safest for him to read a prayer from an orthodox prayer-book. But when communing with God alone in prayer, mistakes in grammar and pronunciation do not matter. There you may speak to God as you would to a confidential friend. Let us always remember that it is not the fine composition that makes the fervent prayer.

What should be our attitude when praying? Our prayers are supplications; when offering them we are suppliants, and the suppliant must adopt a humble demeanour. From the earliest times it has been customary for the suppliant to prostrate himself, that is, lie prone upon the ground, or at least to fall upon his knees. When in the Old Testament we read of men falling upon their face, the meaning is that they prostrated themselves before God. Christians since the earliest times have bowed their knees in prayer. Paul says: "Therefore I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." In the garden Jesus knelt down to pray. But it may not always be convenient or even possible for us to kneel in prayer. There is no command of God telling us that we must kneel in prayer. Our Saviour says, "When ye stand praying." And even if we remain seated whilst saying a prayer, the bowed head and the closed eyes will be indicative of the reverence we wish to observe.

Let us continue to be instant in prayer. "Ye have not because ye ask not," James tells us. Let us come boldly to the Throne of Grace. None can ever ask too much. It has been said that Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees. Certainly prayer is a great weapon to be used by us in fighting the good fight of faith. Let us pray without ceasing, that is, regularly, in everything giving thanks, for that is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning us. Let us always remember

What a Friend we have in Jesus,
 All our sins and griefs to bear:
 What a privilege to carry
 Everything to God in prayer!
 Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
 Oh, what needless pain we bear -
 All because we do not carry
 Everything to God in prayer. Amen.