

**“How Much More Will the Heavenly Father Give”**

*One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray...” (Luke 11:1-13).*

Prayer is one of the great mysteries and miracles of the Christian faith. The idea that anywhere and at any time we can go directly to God and that the almighty, eternal, all-knowing, ever-present creator of all that is will not only hear our prayer, but has promised that He will always answer?!? This is more than our minds can process and, by our own reason, prayer almost seems impossible.

If you grew up in a Christian home then prayer was probably something introduced to you at a young age. I can still remember being tucked in at night when I was a little boy and listening as my mom and dad went through a litany of bedtime prayers. And then, after the covers had been pulled tight and the lights had been turned off, I vividly recall continuing the conversation on my own, talking to God about the problems and drama of my four year-old life...and I was confident that He was hanging on my every word. I'm sure that at some point in your journey of faith you have felt this same prayerful intimacy with God; knowing that regardless of what the day had held and no matter how big your failures had been you could go to God and He would listen.

So...how has your prayer life been lately? Do you still approach God with this kind of confidence and certainty? Have you taken Him at His word that you can ask and seek and knock? Have you been persistent in your prayers? Have you waited and looked for the Lord's response with the anticipation that He will keep His promise?

For some of you, this may be the case, but I also know from my own experience, that every believer goes through times when our prayer life seems to dry up. And I know that for some of you today, a regular prayer life doesn't exist. Maybe you've been disappointed by God's answer or perhaps you've simply given up on the whole idea of prayer, reasoning that God certainly could not be interested in the details of your life and prayer for you has become nothing more than an empty custom or sentimental childhood memory.

In today's Gospel reading, it's hard to know what may have motivated the disciple's question in verse one, but I think it's safe to say from our own experience that his question about prayer was formed from something that was lacking in his own prayer life. The disciples had followed Jesus throughout His ministry, they had witnessed His miracles, they had heard His teaching and, in their time with Jesus, they had also watched Him pray. Now, it's important to understand that for good first-century Jewish men, prayer would have been a very common part of their everyday existence. Prescribed, liturgical prayers would have been offered three times a day and, kind of like the rote prayers that we learned to speak as children, the disciples would have recited the assigned prayers at sunrise, in the middle of the afternoon and again at sunset. This was part of their daily ritual as good Jews and these predetermined prayer times would have been as routine as any other daily chore. These men were used to praying a lot...and that's what makes the disciple's question so interesting.

You see, they noticed something different in the way Jesus prayed. While He almost certainly joined His disciples for prayer at the prescribed times during the day, Jesus also prayed at other times and these prayers were different. It's clear from the Gospels that Jesus prayed often and this unique and vital part of His life wasn't lost on the disciples. So, after watching Jesus pray day after day, one bold and possibly struggling disciple finally asks Him: “Lord teach us to pray” and what Jesus provided in response to this simple request still guides and inspires our prayers today.

You see, in today's reading Jesus not only teaches us to pray, but He also encourages us to be persistent and expectant in our prayer life – not because of who we are or what we bring to the table, but because He gives us the prayer and because God loves to give good gifts to His children. Prayer is mysterious and prayer is miraculous and yet the reason that Christians are people of prayer is because Jesus taught us to pray. Think about this: the perfect, holy life of God's own Son included prayer. In fact, Luke records more of Jesus' prayers than any other Gospel writer. He shows the Son of God talking to His Father and, by His example, Jesus taught His followers to pray and when the disciples came to Jesus asking, “Lord, teach us to pray,” Jesus immediately answered their request by teaching the way and the very words to say. In these words that we all know, Jesus invited us to pray and please know that every time you earnestly pray “The Lord's Prayer” you can be sure this prayer pleases God and that it covers everything we need. Our Savior who suffered on the cross for

us, and shed His blood to cover our sins, and rose again from the grave to lead us into heaven...this Son of God gave us this prayer to pray. And the first word He taught us to pray says it all: "Father."

Now, when we hear the word "father," it's always colored by the image of our earthly fathers. You may have had a great dad, a man who cared for you and loved you, who gave you good things and made sure that you had what you needed in life...but that's not true for everybody here today. Some fathers are cruel and harsh and unfair. An earthly father may be absent or uncaring and, at the very least, every earthly father is sinful and I'm sure that those images can influence how we think about *God as our Father* and, at times, it might even keep us from praying. But Jesus knew this about us and He even addressed this problem by using a parable that at first glance seems a little odd. Jesus said, "What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?" (Luke 11:11-12). The questions are so ridiculous that the answer doesn't even need to be spoken. Of course, no normal human father would ever do such a thing! To paraphrase the words of Jesus, today we might say: "If your child asks for some meat, would you give him some broken glass? Or if your daughter asks for some milk, would you give her a cup of rat poison?" The answer is implied in the absurdity of the question and here Jesus has made His point: Even sinful human fathers give good gifts *and what we're talking about here is our perfect and holy and loving heavenly Father!* If weak and sinful human fathers wouldn't willingly give hurtful and harmful things to their kids, but would typically give them good gifts, then "how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13).

My friends, please notice the punctuation at the end of our reading. This is not a question and it's not a point of discussion left open for debate. In this emphatic statement from Jesus, we hear a promise! The heavenly Father gives much more, even the gift of the Holy Spirit, to His children! The Father's gracious nature is to give heavenly treasures – the forgiveness of sins and the promise of heaven – all in the name and for the sake of His own Son, Jesus Christ. And the Holy Spirit makes these gifts known to us through the words of Gospel and in the waters of Holy Baptism and at the table of our Lord's Supper. Through these gifts, the Holy Spirit creates and nourishes and sustains the faith He has given. And this true, saving faith changes the way we look at the Father. Faith removes the scales of sin and helps us to see that our heavenly Father gives us everything, even His Holy Spirit to keep us to the day when heaven becomes our reality.

So when we pray, our prayers go to our heavenly Father and, just as human fathers would not give their children stones for bread or scorpions for eggs or snakes for fish, we can be absolutely sure that our heavenly Father will not give us what is harmful. Instead, our Father answers our prayers for our good, even pouring out His Holy Spirit who brings life and salvation and the faith to wait and to pray continuously and to trust that our heavenly Father will only give us what is best. My friends, you can keep praying as redeemed and precious children of God because – by faith in Jesus Christ – that is exactly what you are! And this means that you have the privilege to come to God in prayer just like a child in need comes to her loving father.

When Abraham Lincoln was the President of the United States, he had one rule about access to his office. While other people had to knock and be admitted, his son Tad could come in anytime, about any concern. The President would drop everything, stop any conversation and give his full, undivided attention to his son...*and that's how it is with us!* We are God's sons and daughters through faith in Christ – that's what the cross means! And, through the perfect Son of God, you are considered God's own perfect child and you have access to your Father. You can enter His presence at any time and in any place and you have the promise that your prayers will always be heard.

Luther once wrote, "whenever a Christian prays, 'Dear Father, let Your will be done,' God speaks from on high and says, 'Yes, dear child, it shall be so'" (LC III, 32). The Apostle John gives us that same assurance when he writes, "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him" (I John 5:14-15).

Prayer is a mystery and it is a miracle and yet, we can keep on praying because God, our Father loves us and will always give us much more than we ask or expect, even the Holy Spirit, and we can pray with complete confidence because we are now His own precious children by faith in Christ Jesus. So, my friends, keep on praying *and praying and praying*, because our Father is listening and He loves to answer the prayers of His children...for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Pastor Thomas A. Eggold