

**First Lutheran Church of Venice**  
**Foundations Class – Fall 2013**  
**Session 6 – The Life of Prayer: The Lord’s Prayer**

"My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. Words without thoughts never to Heaven go." – Claudius, *Hamlet*, III, 3

1. Do you find it difficult to pray, or feel like you are merely mouthing words like Claudius?
2. Why pray?
  - a. *Command*: We have a duty to pray (2<sup>nd</sup> commandment, Ex. 20:7, Phil. 4:4-7)
  - b. *Promise*: God promises to hear it (Ps. 50:15, Mt. 7:7-8, Lk. 18:1-8)
  - c. *Words*: God gives us the words and the Spirit (Mt. 6:9-13, Lk. 11:2-4, Rom. 8:26)
  - d. *Need*: Our need ought to “drive and compel us to pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:16-18).
3. How should we pray?
  - a. Posture
  - b. Prepared prayers vs. Spontaneous prayers
4. The Lord’s Prayer as a model and teacher for the whole life of prayer: “in seven successive articles or petitions are comprehended all the needs that continually beset us, each one so great that it should impel us to keep praying for it all our lives” (Luther, *Large Catechism*, Lord’s Prayer, 34)
5. Structure of the Lord’s Prayer
  - a. The “Thy” petitions – 1-3 – addressed to God in indirect form, concerning God’s sovereign action above and beyond our lives, though touching the center of our lives as well
  - b. The “Our/Us” petitions – 4-7 – bold requests to God regarding our needs and our neighbors needs
6. A walk-through of the Lord’s Prayer and Luther’s explanations

## Helpful Advice on the Life of Prayer from Luther

From "A Simple Way to Pray: How One Should Pray, for Peter, the Master Barber," 1535<sup>1</sup>

### *On How to Pray When You Don't Feel Like It*

Dear Master Peter: I will tell you as best I can what I do personally when I pray. May our dear Lord grant to you and to everybody to do it better than I! Amen.

First, when I feel that I have become cool and joyless in prayer because of other tasks or thoughts (for the flesh and the devil always impede and obstruct prayer), I take my little psalter, hurry to my room, or, if it be the day and hour for it, to the church where a congregation is assembled and, as time permits, I say quietly to myself and word-for-word the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and, if I have time, some words of Christ or of Paul, or some psalms, just as a child might do.

### *On Good Times to Pray*

It is a good thing to let prayer be the first business of the morning and the last at night. Guard yourself carefully against those false, deluding ideas which tell you, "Wait a little while. I will pray in an hour; first I must attend to this or that." Such thoughts get you away from prayer into other affairs which so hold your attention and involve you that nothing comes of prayer for that day.

### *On Posture and Form of Prayer*

When your heart has been warmed by such recitation to yourself [of the Ten Commandments, the words of Christ, etc.] and is intent upon the matter, kneel or stand with your hands folded and your eyes toward heaven and speak or think as briefly as you can...

[After a long discussion of each petition of the Lord's Prayer, Luther says:] You should also know that I do not want you to recite all these words in your prayer. That would make it nothing but idle chatter and prattle, read word for word out of a book as were the rosaries by the laity and the prayers of the priests and monks. Rather do I want your heart to be stirred and guided concerning the thoughts which ought to be comprehended in the Lord's Prayer. These thoughts may be expressed, if your heart is rightly warmed and inclined toward prayer, in many different ways and with more words or fewer. I do not bind myself to such words or syllables, but say my prayers in one fashion today, in another tomorrow, depending upon my mood and feeling. I stay however, as nearly as I can, with the same general thoughts and ideas. It may happen occasionally that I may get lost among so many ideas in one petition that I forego the other six. If such an abundance of good thoughts comes to us we ought to disregard the other petitions, make room for such thoughts, listen in silence, and under no circumstances obstruct them. The Holy Spirit himself preaches here, and one word of his sermon is far better than a thousand of our prayers. Many times I have learned more from one prayer than I might have learned from much reading and speculation.

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<sup>1</sup> Luther, M. *Vol. 43: Luther's Works, Devotional Writings II* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (193-198). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.