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Pentecost 7

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Praying as Children”

Text: Luke 11:1-13; Genesis 18:17-33; Colossians 2:6-19

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Lord, teach us to pray.

It's an odd request, don't you think? Surely the disciples knew how to pray. The Jews had their prayers. They prayed in the Synagogue. They prayed the Psalms. *But something was missing.* They didn't pray as Jesus did. But to be true disciples - that is, followers, students, learners - they would need to learn this and follow Jesus in this way, too. It's time, Lord. You've taught us so much. ***Teach us to pray.*** John taught his disciples. You teach your disciples.

And actually, it's what we need, too. Oh, you know how to pray, right? You pray the Lord's Prayer, you pray before meals, you pray here in church, you pray in times of trouble . . . and yet, like the disciples, we're missing something. Yes? We get busy and so put off our prayers and somehow don't get back to them. We tell people we'll pray for them, and then forget to do so. We want to pray more, know we should pray more, but somehow always fall short. ***Lord, teach us to pray!*** It's not such an odd request after all.

So Jesus does. Of course He does! Maybe He hadn't yet, not because He didn't know they needed it, but because He wanted them to ask. He wanted them to realize it, and the importance of it. How often had they seen Jesus go off by Himself to pray? How often had they tried and failed? How often did they wonder about this? But now they ask. And I'm sure Jesus smiled. *Yes, I'd love to teach you to pray.*

(1.) And he said to them, “When you pray, say: Father . . .”

Now I stopped there, not because the rest of the words aren't important, but because this word is most important. As I teach my catechumens, when you dig deep into the words of this prayer, *the Lord's Prayer* that the Lord gives us to pray, you realize that in these few words, *we are praying for everything.* It's not wrong to pray in addition to these words and with more specific requests as needs arise - that's good! But even if we don't, it's all included here.

But the foundation of it all, is that very first word: **Father**. Or as Matthew says, *Our Father*. Jesus can pray that because He is the Son of God, the Son of the Father. And we can pray that way because we are sons of God in the Son of God. When we come to God through Jesus, we are not coming to Him as Master, Lord, Creator, Sovereign, Almighty, or Most High; we're not coming as servants asking for a favor - we are coming to our **Father**. And that makes a difference.

You do not ask your boss at work, the police officer who pulled you over, or your car mechanic the same as you ask your father at home for things. It's a different relationship - or, at least, it should be. For in God we have a perfect Father, with perfect love for us. A Father who wants to provide and has promised to do so. A Father who isn't in this for Himself - He doesn't need anything, and certainly doesn't need anything from us! He *wants* to give and take care of you. And while He does so much *even without our prayers*, as the catechism repeatedly teaches us, He wants us to turn to Him in prayer, *as dear children ask their dear father*. Like Abraham did, as we heard earlier. That conversation was like a son asking his father, and a father listening to his son.

So why don't we? Why don't we pray like Abraham? Or why don't we *more*? Is it that we doubt our Father's love, that He *wants* to help or really *will* help? Maybe. Or is it because we think we're not worthy, that we have to improve and get better if we want God to listen to our prayers? Or do we think we can handle things ourselves? And that's what God wants us to do - handle it and not bother Him!

Well, Jesus doesn't bother with any of that. Just states the fact. ***When you pray***, do so on the basis of nothing else than this: **Father**. God is your Father and you are His child. He loves you and wants you to pray. He loves you and wants to help and provide. You're not worthy! You'll never be *worthy*. But you're His child, and that's better.

(2.) *But then there's more . . .* Jesus says more. He doesn't only give us the words to say - which is good because even though we have them, we still don't pray as we should, right? So He also teaches us to pray **by sending us folks to pray for**. For the best way to learn is to do.

That's the reason for the parable Jesus then speaks. This man suddenly has a need, something has popped up in His life, and he doesn't have the means to deal with it. Ever been there? So he goes to the one he knows can help him and provide him what he needs. Now in the parable, it's not easy! He has to pester his neighbor to give him what he needs, which is what we often do when we ask each other for things. Especially children! Please, please, PLEASE! We're bold, impudent, persistent,

shameless, even rude maybe at times! If our need is great enough. If we're really feeling pinched.

But Jesus doesn't tell this parable because that's how our Father is, and that we need to be that way with Him! He goes on to say that's NOT how our Father is! That He *wants* to help and give and provide. Good gifts! So ***ask, seek, and knock!*** If we do it with one another, then why not with our Father in heaven?

And fathers listen to their children, even when they won't listen to others. Like the father on his way to work, who passes by the people asking for money he sees everyday. But one day, he is with his daughter, who asks: *Daddy, who are these people? What do they want?* And when he tells her, she looks up at him and asks him: *Can we help them?* And even though he didn't before, he does now. **Because his child asked** and she matters to him.

There are people in our world who cannot pray. They don't know God as their Father and Saviour. But you do. You are His dearly loved child and **you matter to Him**. He has promised to hear and answer your prayers - not just for yourself, but for others, too. So don't sell those prayers short! We don't know exactly what He will do, how or when He will answer those prayers, but we know He will, *the prayers of His children*, according to His good and gracious will.

(3.) So pray these words, pray for these people, and then ask for one more thing too, Jesus says: ***the Holy Spirit***. The Holy Spirit who help us in our weakness, who Himself prays for us, and who helps us to pray. The Holy Spirit who connects us to Jesus, who brings us to the Father. For the Father who sends us great blessings, sends us the two greatest blessings of all: **His Son and His Spirit**, so that we be His children *here in time, and there for eternity*.

I think we sometimes, perhaps, focus on the *there in eternity* at the expense of the *here in time*. Certainly, the *there in eternity* is important. **Eternal life instead of eternal death**. *Sign me up!* **That's why the Father sent His Son** to take our death-causing and God-condemning sins to the cross for us and die for us, to atone for them, to be our sin offering and our guilt offering and our peace offering, that we have peace and unity with God our Father again. And we celebrate that and receive that here each Sunday, culminating with our seat at our Father's Table, to feast on the life-giving Body and Blood of Jesus. And we have forgiveness, life, salvation, and all we need for life as children of God.

But *there in eternity* is not yet. *Here in time* is. And our Father doesn't just want to be our Father then and there, but here and now. And He is, but He also wants us to live that life as His children, in faith and confidence and joy. **And so He also sends us**

His Spirit, that we live as His children *right now*. The Spirit who shows us our sin and shows us our Saviour, so that we repent, receive the forgiveness we need, and live a new life. A sanctified life.

That's the life Paul was describing for the Christians in Colossae in the Epistle we heard today. He says there are a lot of things in this world that would lead us astray and away from God - things the world says are important, are true, are *wisdom*. And they sound good and look good and and we think they give us what we want. But they don't. **Empty deceit**, Paul calls it. Empty. Like opening a beautifully wrapped gift box that gets your hopes up that there's something equally as good and beautiful inside . . . only to find there's nothing in it. Just think of all the things our world points to . . . Do this and you'll have life! Be this and you'll be happy! Follow this way and all will be well! And sometimes churches listen, too. Do this and you'll grow! Be this and your church will be dynamic. Follow this way to success. And you open that great sounding box . . . *and it's empty*.

Now contrast the gifts of God . . . They may not look as good to our eyes . . . I'd rather have a long, hot shower than a little splash of water. I'd rather have steak and potatoes than a tasteless wafer of bread and a sip of mediocre wine. I'd rather have people tell me I'm right and good on my own, just the way I am (or want to be), than *I forgive you all your sins*. I'd rather read a really good novel than the Bible. But while the gifts of God may not look beautiful on the outside, **the gifts they contain are unequaled**. The forgiveness, salvation, and new life we need, purchased **for you** by the blood of Jesus, and given **to you** by the Holy Spirit. That you not lead a life that ends in death, but live a life that will never end.

Therefore, Saint Paul said, *as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving*.

So pray that be true for you. To live a life in Christ, in His love and forgiveness, in His grace and mercy, abounding in thanksgiving. Maybe with all you're going through in your life right now, such a life seems impossible, like climbing Mt. Everest! And for you, **it is!** But not for your Saviour, for whom all things are possible. Who after being buried and crushed under the sins of the world - a mountain of sins far greater than Mt. Everest! - rose to life again, and ascended not to the top of a mountain, but far higher than that! To heaven, to the right hand of the Father, where He is ruling all things for the good of His church and His children. **For you**.

So **Lord, teach us to pray?** Yes! To pray for this. All this. And praying for this, receive it. And receiving it, live it. For *so you have commanded us to pray, and have promised to hear us*. So *Amen, amen!* Which means, *Yes, yes*, be of good cheer, be

confident, be bold, dear child of God! For *Amen, amen*, means *yes, yes, it shall be so!*

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.