

IN NOMINE JESU

CHRIST STILL INTERCEDES FOR HIS PEOPLE

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

St. Paul writes to us,

All of you remain anxious for nothing, but in all things, by the prayers and the petitions with thanksgiving let the requests of all of you be made known to God.¹

This morning's service order was compiled around 15 centuries ago that the people of God might have, in particular, daily readings from the Psalms. Almost all our words up to this point have been delivered from the Psalms, the oft-called "prayer book" of the Bible. It is fitting on this Day of National Thanksgiving that the Church hear from the words that lead her into prayers, petitions, thanksgivings and requests to God for all peoples, nations, and tribes. By focusing our ears, then minds, and finally hearts, on the ancient true and faithful Word of God, the Spirit will then guide us into prayers that are pleasing to the Father.

That is why this morning's service included not just one Psalm during the Psalmody - as we are accustomed to hearing - but three. We want you to leave here having been filled with the Word of God, that the Spirit will use it today in you to - even when you are not consciously thinking about prayer - lead you into prayers, even prayers of thanks. St. Paul still says to the congregations of Christ Jesus,

All of you remain anxious for nothing, but in all things, by the prayers and the petitions with thanksgiving let the requests of all of you be made known to God.²

¹Philippians 4:6.

²Philippians 4:6.

Two specific actions of the congregation are commended in those words. First are “the prayers.” Historically, these appear to be the set prayers of the people, recorded first from the era of the synagogue during the dispersion of Judah and Israel, formed sometime between 300 BC through AD 200. They were received, and then adapted for Christian worship. One form of such set prayer is found in the readings of the Psalms. The adaption the Christian Church made was the inclusion of the Trinitarian doxology at the end of each public reading of the Psalm prayers.

The other action advocated by Paul in this letter is the inclusion of petitions to God. These may also be called supplications. They are the Christian congregation’s humble honoring God for all His gracious provisions for our lives, livelihoods, and eternal life in Christ. These are our humble petitions asked of God the Creator of all things, with earnestness and sincerity. Hear again St. Paul’s encouragement for the Church:

All of you remain anxious for nothing, but in all things, by the prayers and the petitions with thanksgiving let the requests of all of you be made known to God.³

God, through the Apostle, in this section, calls the people whom He has called through Word and Sacraments, to not hold anxiousness in anything. Anxiousness is not simple worry or fretting. It is, more specifically, nervous anticipation of the unknown. While we might expect such encouragement for times when things are not going well – as in our current economy – we also need such reminders when things are going well. St. Paul writes, *in all things*.

³Philippians 4:6.

Further, of all the religions of the world, the Christian alone can make such humble prayers and supplications before the Lord with all thanksgiving. That is because, of all the faiths ever created by man, or revealed by the angels of the fallen one, only the true Christian faith declares, without any work on the part of humans, that God is great, merciful and loving, so much so, that He has forgiven our sins in Christ before we even ask, and that He has answered our prayers in Christ before we make our requests known. On this day of National Thanksgiving, as on every day, God hears the faithful prayers of His faithful people for the sake of Jesus! He who cried out on the cross, with His dying breath, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do," still pleads His death for us, and for the world.

Be encouraged, yet saddened, that God hears our prayers this day and everyday for the sake of the innocent suffering and death of Jesus. Encouraged – for your petitions are known to God and made right by Christ. Saddened – that those who have no saving faith in Jesus do not have the Advocate with the Father.

God has given prayer as His gift to those whom He has named His own. [You have learned and confess that] God's will is done even without the prayers of the Christians... God encourages us to believe and act as if we are His children. As such, we are able to approach Him in prayer, with all boldness and confidence... Further, our prayers, offered to Him in Christ Jesus, are the instruments that God uses to strengthen us and keep us firm in His Word and in the Faith

even to our own last day. Dr. Luther writes, "This we must know, that all our safety and protection consist in prayer alone."⁴

It is on account of the great and terrible forces of evil that assails the faithful that the Lord has given the gift of prayer to the faithful. In themselves, Christians do not have enough strength to contest the devil, his minions, the world and even their own sinful flesh. Christians... prayer [is] a precious gift! God, who knows all things, understands what will be requested even before [you] ask. Yet, He desires [you] pray that [you] may, in [your] petitions, yearning in [your] hearts to greater godly desires, and opening [your]selves to receive many good things from Him. Prayer does not change the mind of God, but changes the minds of those who pray (and who hear such godly prayers) to be more like His mind.

God has even provided for His people in prayer when they fail for words. He has promised that His Spirit will intercede for them with sighs and groans that only He understands.⁵ Prayer has God's command, and brings with it His blessings. Indeed, the Confessions give high honor and regard for prayer, when they state:

"Ultimately, if we should list as sacraments all the things that have God's command and a promised attached to them, then why not prayer, which can most truly be called a sacrament? It has both the command of God and many promises. If it were placed among the sacraments and thus given, so to speak, a more exalted position, this would move men to pray."⁶

God desires that people would pray to Him in faith, that He might grant them more than they request. Further, with regard to corporate prayer, God has revealed that whatever the

⁴ Tappert, Theodore, ed. The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959.

⁵ Romans 8:26-27.

⁶ Tappert, Theodore, ed. The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959.

Church asks according to His will He will grant to her.⁷ God's Word encourages the congregations the Holy Spirit assembles through Word and Sacraments to make their requests known to Him.⁸

So, then, how may we compose a prayer of the faithful? First, we start with the Word of God, as in our Psalms for today. Second, we give thanks for that Word. Third, in faith, we confess that we have not kept that very Word. Finally, we make our specific petitions, requests, and intercessions. (Most of you have learned that discipline, but how often do you practice it)? Such a format keeps us from the "gimme" prayers and keeps our hearts and minds focused on the Word of God.

Remember, Christ still intercedes for His people. The prayer of the faithful will be acceptable to God the Father. That is because we have one intercessor, the Son, and one Comforter, who prays with and for us, even when we fail for words. Therefore, for today, and eternity, in bad times and good times, keep St. Paul's words close,

All of you remain anxious for nothing, but in all things, by the prayers and the petitions with thanksgiving let the requests of all of you be made known to God.⁹

And God promises through His words:

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Day of National Thanksgiving (One-year series)
Daniel 8:1-10; Philippians 4:6-20; Luke 17:11-19
November 27, 2008

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse
SOLI DEO GLORIA

⁷ I John 5:14-15.

⁸ Philippians 4:6-7. This entire section is a quote from my paper, "A MODEL OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE: BIBLICAL, CONFSSIONAL AND EVANGELICAL," presented as a post-course project to Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Doctor of Ministry program, November 25, 2008.

⁹Philippians 4:6.