

Lent Mid-Week #1, The Lord's Prayer and Our Savior's Passion

February 10, 2015

1 John 3:1a

Address and First Petition

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Dear Friends in Christ,

I heard a radio spot the other day that touched my heart. Children who had been in foster care, i.e. without a family of their own, related how happy they were someone had adopted them. The love those adopting families lavished on the boys and girls made the children family members in their new homes. The children now had loving parents whom they could address as mother and father. The children expect every blessing from love.

Hear St. John describe the parallel scenario between God and us. “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God! And that is what we are!” God lavished his love on us by sending his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to pay for our sins by his death on the cross, and justify us by his resurrection from the dead. Then, God lavished his love on us by adopting us into his family through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the gospel.

Now, we call the holy God, “Our Father in heaven.” Since we know God calls us his children, we petition him first that we keep his name holy by teaching his Word in its truth and purity, and by leading a godly life according to it. What child wants to bring shame or disgrace to the family name?

We use this familial address, in whatever wording, and pray this petition because our baptisms have connected us to the Lord Jesus' Passion. Paul wrote to the Romans, “Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may have a new life.” That new life is my eternal spiritual membership in God's family because God lavished his eternal love on me in Christ.

One of my favorite movies is The Right Stuff. It is the story of the seven Mercury astronauts who were America's original “star sailors.” At one point there was concern over funding the project. You may remember the line, “No bucks, no Buck Rogers.” The meaning is no money, no space program. As we begin our Lenten worship we may say, No Lord's Passion, no Lord's Prayer. That we are able to address God, whose name, Luther says, “is indeed holy by itself,” as “Our Father” depends totally on our Lord's suffering and death for us.

Our Lord's Passion ended the separation between us and God by removing the barrier of our guilt for breaking God's holy law. Paul wrote to the Colossians, “God forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away nailing it to the cross.” [2:13b, 14]

“Our Father in heaven.” God tenderly invites us with these words, along with our brothers and sisters in Christ, to believe he is our true Father, and boldly and confidently go to him as dear children approach their dear father. Even as we go to our heavenly Father whose name is holy by itself we want to keep his name holy among us also.

When I was at MLS and you earned a letter in sports, you would have Cardinals embroidered on the back of your letter jacket. Our coaches frequently reminded us not to bring shame or disgrace to ourselves or to the name we now proudly displayed across our shoulders. Not so much then, but now we see the same thing with a player’s family name. The same warning applies, doesn’t it?

We call our Father in heaven by many terms of endearment which he has given us to use: Lord, Savior, Jesus, and all names with which we speak of God. We want to guard those names and not use them in a thoughtless or blasphemous manner. This is true also of God’s reputation.

In a nutshell, God says, “I am a jealous God.” I don’t want my glory shared with another. I don’t want my reputation smeared by those who speak lies about what I say and do, or by sons and daughters who bring shame to the family name through disobedience rather than living a holy life according to my will. The First Petition is closely tied to the First and Second Commandments, isn’t it? Our God is one, the true God. His name is holy. He will not tolerate the misuse of his names or his reputation so God commands, “Do not misuse the name of the Lord your God.”

When Jesus was in Gethsemane and prayed, our Savior addressed his God as “Father.” Jesus trusted in his Father’s name to require of him only what was necessary to redeem us from death and hell. Jesus was willing to do that. On the cross carrying out that work, the Son-Father relationship ended and Jesus cried out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.” Then, after Jesus had complete his mission, he once again addressed his God with full confidence of new life after death, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”

We call upon “Our Father” in faith because of the love God has lavished on us to make us his children. We always pray in Jesus’ name for because of him God is “Our Father.” Because of our Lord’s Passion we never will have to cry out asking God why he has forsaken us. At the end of our earthly days, we may commend ourselves into our Father’s hands in full confidence of new life after death.

In the meantime, as we petition “Our Father in heaven” for the blessings of soul and body that follow, he will hear and answer us for the sake of his Son who suffered and died on the cross. There on Calvary’s holy mountain sinners ruined by the fall gain the privilege and confidence to pray not only this prayer Jesus taught us, but as the Apostle Paul writes to the Philippians, “in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present you requests to God.” [Philippians 4:6]

No Lord’s Passion, no Lord’s Prayer. Our Lord Jesus’ Passion, our privilege and blessing to be his brothers and sisters who believe God is our Father and go with Jesus boldly and confidently to “Our Father who art in heaven.” “Hallowed be your name.” Amen. <SDG>