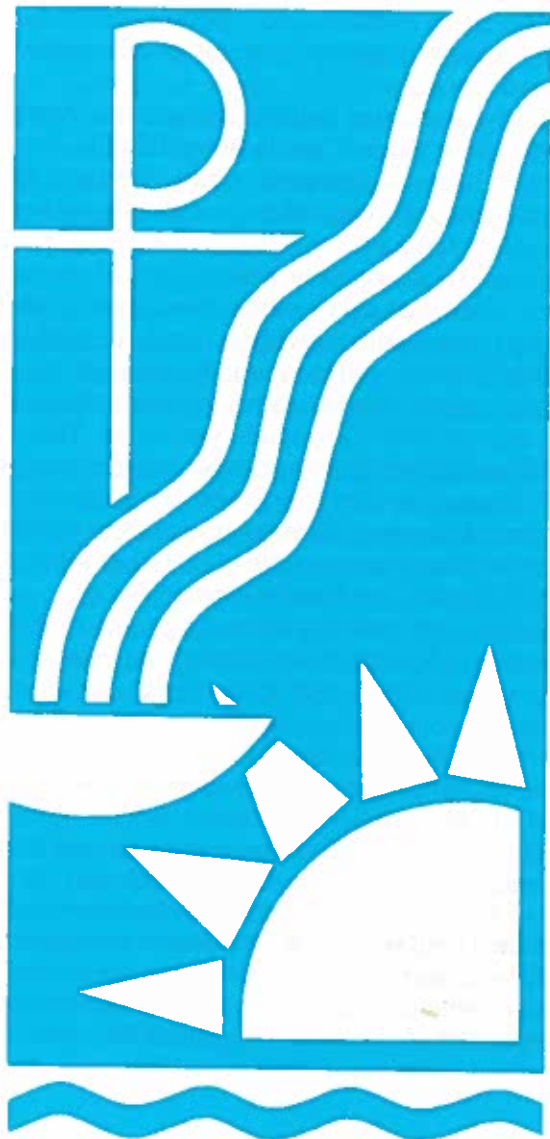


## THE LORD'S PRAYER



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## CHRIST PUTS THE WORDS IN OUR MOUTHS

### THE INTRODUCTION

Our Father in heaven.

#### *What does this mean?*

Here God encourages us to believe that he is truly our Father and we are his children. We therefore are to pray to him with complete confidence just as children speak to their loving father.

### THE DOXOLOGY

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

#### *What does "Amen" mean?*

Amen means Yes, it shall be so. We say Amen because we are certain that such petitions are pleasing to our Father in heaven and are heard by him. For he himself has commanded us to pray in this way and has promised to hear us.



**T**he good Lord would like to hear from you. Having decided to be your God—creating you, setting you free in Christ and making a saint of you—God wonders if there isn't something you need, something that might be bothering you. So God wants you to pray. It is just like the God who raised Jesus from the dead. This God doesn't ever know when to back off.

But there is something more here, too. God knows the shape your life is going to take. You are going to have times of joy and celebration. But there are going to be some tough times, too. As long as the old Adam or Eve hangs around your neck, you are going to have some struggles with yourself. The neighbors aren't always so much fun. And there are other powers you are going to have to contend with, as well.

So even as Christ has taken hold of you, you are a battleground—someone being fought over. You need to know how to call out to God, how to get hold of the one who has promised to help you and who will never let you down. So you have to learn how to pray.

There's no better way to learn than to study the prayer Christ himself taught us, the Lord's own prayer. We'll start out by looking at the beginning and end of it to see how it can be prayed with certainty. Then we'll look some more at how we can call God *Father*, even when the old self in us is making a mess of our prayers.



Jean-Claude Lejeune



### *Praying for certain*

In the Commandments and the Creed, we have already seen how we can be certain that God listens to our prayers. God not only hears them, God wants us to pray, teaches us to pray, and prays for us.

First of all, we can pray because God has promised to be our God. It's the First Commandment again—"I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods." "I am yours," God says, "and you are mine. I have decided for you."

In Christ, God put this promise into action. God made it flesh and blood for us, becoming a person like us to become our friend and Lord. Christ went to the cross and death for us, bearing our sins in his body, to carry out the promise of the First Commandment—to make us his own people, his sons and daughters.

Because we have this promise in Christ, we can call on God for anything and everything we need. It is like getting word from the president or prime minister that says, "Give me a call if you need anything." But it is on a far bigger scale, for it is God's word and promise. Because God is your God and promises to help you, you can say to the creator of the heavens and the earth, "Dear God, you have promised—I need your help."

But second, God not only tells us that we may pray, God commands us to pray. It is as if God is talking to himself, "If I just tell them that they can pray, they might not dare to. I'll command them to pray so that they'll know how much I want them to come to me for whatever they need." Or it's like a parent, guardian, or friend saying, "Now listen. I want to help you. Call me and I'll be right there."

So in the Second Commandment, God tells us to "call on him in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving." It is a friendly command that God lovingly gives us to assure us that we not only can but should ask for God's help.

God could hardly do more than that, we might think. "I've told you that you may pray," God could have said, "and not only that, I've commanded you to pray. If you mess it up now, it's all over."

But God did more. Having given us the promise and commanded us to pray, Christ himself teaches us how to pray.



That's why it's called the *Lord's Prayer*. It is the prayer that Christ taught to his disciples and, through his Word, teaches to us.

Perhaps the disciples had some of the same questions and problems many of us have with prayer. Maybe praying had become an automatic routine for them. Or maybe they weren't quite sure how to act or what to say when they prayed. Whatever the reason, they asked Jesus to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1).

There are two versions of the Lord's Prayer. One is in Matthew 6:9-13 and the other is in Luke 11:2-4. We use the version found in Matthew. The Doxology, "For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever" isn't in either Matthew or Luke but has been part of the Lord's Prayer ever since the first century.

The fact that it is Jesus who teaches us this prayer is most important. Jesus is *Emmanuel*, God with us. When Jesus teaches us to pray, he knows what he's talking about—he's the one whom God sent to bring home the promise for us, making it possible for us to pray.

So Jesus was sent by the one whose name we pray will be hallowed, the one whose kingdom will come and whose will be done, the one who gives us our daily bread and forgives us our sins, who helps us in times of trial and delivers us from evil.

So praying the Lord's Prayer is like singing in a choir or playing in a band directed by the one who wrote the music. Or it is like being coached by the one who invented the game and who will judge the outcome. Or it is like being given the answers by the one who will give you the test. Jesus, the one who bears our prayers and answers them, puts the words into our mouths to teach us to pray.

But God doesn't even stop there. "We do not know how to pray as we ought," Paul says in Romans 8:26. Even when Jesus puts the words in our mouths, our prayers easily become routine and meaningless. We worry and doubt, wondering if God really listens. Or we start thinking about how sincere we are and how God must be impressed with how much we want help. No matter how hard we try, we can't pray as we should.

But God isn't waiting for us to make our prayers good



Jim Whitmer

enough. Having said that we may pray, having commanded us to pray, and having taught us to pray, God prays with and for us. The "Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words" Paul says (Romans 8:26). It's like a father or mother who helps a child in every way and finally says, "Here, I'll do that for you." Having said to each of us, "You are mine," God goes all the way for us, even praying for us.

That's the basis for our confidence, and that's why we can pray with complete certainty that God hears us. We can pray to God as children speak to their loving parents, confidently and joyfully, because God promises that we may, commands us and teaches us to pray, and then prays with and for us.





## Calling God Father

That's why we can call God *Father*, calling out to him as you call out to your mother or father at home: "Dad" or "Mom." God became your Father when you were baptized, when God first promised to be your God. That was and is God's promise to you. Not, "I'm going to be like a father," or "like a mother to you," but "I'm going to be your God"—your father and mother all wrapped up into one.

We can call God *Father*, too, because he is going to dwell with us, as the book of Revelation says (21:3). He isn't an absentee father who stays away, sending home occasional letters and gifts. God dwells with us now, in the Word and the sacraments. And God will stay with us in the future, raising us from the dead to take us to be with Christ. Then we will live with God as loving parents live with their children.

The old self doesn't care for this. In fact, it hates this. Prayer is a big problem for the old sinner in us, something to be avoided or used only for your own purposes, because when you pray you are admitting that you need God's help and grace. That's the one thing the old Adam or Eve doesn't want to admit, not unless it's with the provision that you can tell God exactly what to do and how to do it. So the old you makes the Lord's Prayer automatic and pointless or else insists that God has to do your bidding.

But once you hear the promise in and behind it, the Lord's Prayer becomes entirely different. Putting the old Adam or Eve to death in each of us, God calls out the new you—the you who can and will call on God with joy and certainty. As this new you comes forth, the you who is a believer, the Lord's Prayer blossoms and sings with all the love and grace of God's promise.

Then it's not dead repetition or some kind of hocus-pocus anymore, something that we just do out of habit. Rather, it is a person-to-person conversation with your God, the God of the promise, the God of Good Friday and Easter. Then, boldly and confidently, you can begin by saying "Our Father in heaven" and when you have finished praying, say "Amen"—that's the way it's going to be.



## THE FIRST PROMISE Baptismal In your name.

### What does this mean?

God's name certainly is holy in itself, but we ask in this prayer that we may keep it holy.

### When does this happen?

God's name is honored whenever His Word is taught in His church and purity and we as children of God live in harmony with it. Help us to do this, heavenly Father! Let anyone who teaches or lives contrary to the Word of God distance their name among us. Keep us from doing this, heavenly Father!

## THE SECOND PROMISE Your kingdom come.

### What does this mean?

God's kingdom comes indeed without our praying for it, but we ask in this prayer that it may come when we can.