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EVERY DAY A GIFT

THE FOURTH PETITION

Give us today our daily bread.

*What does this mean?*

God gives daily bread, even without our prayer, to all people, though sinful, but we ask in this prayer that he will help us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanks.

*What is meant by "daily bread"?*

Daily bread includes everything needed for this life, such as food and clothing, home and property, work and income, a devoted family, an orderly community, good government, favorable weather, peace and health, a good name, and true friends and neighbors.

THE FIFTH PETITION

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.



*What does this mean?*

We ask in this prayer that our Father in heaven would not hold our sins against us and because of them refuse to hear our prayer. And we pray that he would give us everything by grace, for we sin every day and deserve nothing but punishment. So we on our part will heartily forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.

**A**fter praying for the great and glorious gifts of God—God's name, kingdom, and will—now we get down to the basic stuff of daily life: bread and butter and getting along with our neighbors.

To be sure, the first three petitions have plenty to do with daily life, too. As God creates the new you in us who will keep God's name holy, God charges our days with freedom. And as God helps us to look forward to the coming of the kingdom, God fills our days with hope, giving us the whole new creation to look forward to.

But freedom and hope for the new day wouldn't be complete if our tables were empty or if we had to wonder constantly what God and our neighbors think of us. So, after teaching us to pray for the new you and the new creation, Jesus tells us to ask for daily bread and forgiveness, as well.

It's not that we somehow have to talk God into giving us these gifts. Most all of us have enough daily bread already, many more than their share. And over and over again, God has assured us of forgiveness. God will continue to give us these gifts, along with everything else we need to live while we await the new day. That's the promise—the promise of the First Commandment and all three articles of the Creed.

The trouble is that we don't always realize it. In fact, we seldom do. We either take daily bread and forgiveness for granted, never giving them a thought, or we worry ourselves



sick about them, thinking that somehow God will forget us. So Jesus teaches us to pray for these gifts, helping us in this way to realize who gives them to us.

Why is it so hard to realize that these are gifts? That's the first question we'll consider in this chapter. After that, we'll discuss what realizing the gifts can mean for daily life.

*Looking to ourselves*

If there's one thing your neighbors have in common with you, it is worrying. They might be taller or shorter, fatter or skinnier; they might be neighbors across the street, across the border, or across the ocean, but you can be sure that they worry just like you do. Worrying seems to be one common denominator that marks us all as people.

Sometimes there seems to be very good reason for worry. To put bread on our tables, for instance, it takes a whole combination of people and things working together. It takes good farmers, good farms, good crops, good prices, good stores, and good jobs to earn good money.

Food isn't all we need to live each day, either. We also need clothing, places to live, good governments to protect us, good names, and good neighbors, plus more. And each requires its own combination of people and things working together.

With so many needs and so many combinations needed to get them, it isn't any wonder that people worry. You may not have gone to bed hungry once in your life. But many people do and with the sinful self, the world, and the devil hard at work, there's no guarantee that you won't sometime be one of them. That can be worrisome.

If you haven't yet had to worry about the food on your table or the other things you need for your body, you may have sometimes wondered—possibly even worried—about what other people think of you. That, too, seems to be one of our characteristics as people: feeling out of step or out of place with the people around us. Some notice it more, some less, but the feeling always seem to be there somewhere, gnawing its way around.

Here again there may seem to be good reason for it. You might have done something that makes you feel guilty. Or you



might just feel there is something about you that makes you less than acceptable, less than desirable, whether it's as small as an unsightly wart or as big as feeling awkward, ugly, or stupid.

If that isn't enough, there can be some deeper worries. No matter how often we hear God's promise of forgiveness, at times it is easy to become convinced that we have done things to disqualify ourselves from it, that we're out of place or out of step not only with some neighbors, but with God. At such times, people can try as hard as they want to not to worry about it, but the feeling keeps coming back.

It is these worries about what we need to live and what others think of us that make it so difficult to realize that God gives us everything we need as a gift. They are the old you's worries. That's how the sinful self, the world, and the devil work—by focusing our attention on what we love or fear and making it appear that we have to get or avoid those things by ourselves. Then we worry.

See how it works? As long as we're worried, we keep looking to ourselves, trying to find ways to get what we want or to avoid what we fear. Then if we get enough food and get along well with others, we take such gifts for granted and start worrying about something else we want or fear. Or if we're hungry and feeling guilty, we concentrate on how hungry and guilty we are. No matter which way it goes, God's Word and promise are ignored and forgotten.

Worries, whether well based or imaginary, always come from God's opponents. They are the only gifts they can give us, and they give us as much as they can, trying to convince us that we should always look to ourselves and ourselves alone. Then worries become a circle, one worry feeding on another and another until the circle closes in with no apparent escape. Soon the promise is forgotten altogether.

### *Looking to the promise*

How's this circle going to be broken? Well, one thing's sure from the beginning: It's not going to be broken as long as we keep looking to ourselves. If you've ever had a bad attack of worries, you know that. It doesn't do a bit of good to say "Don't



worry" or "There's nothing to be afraid of" at such a time. Hearing such words, you just worry about being worried or get scared of being scared.

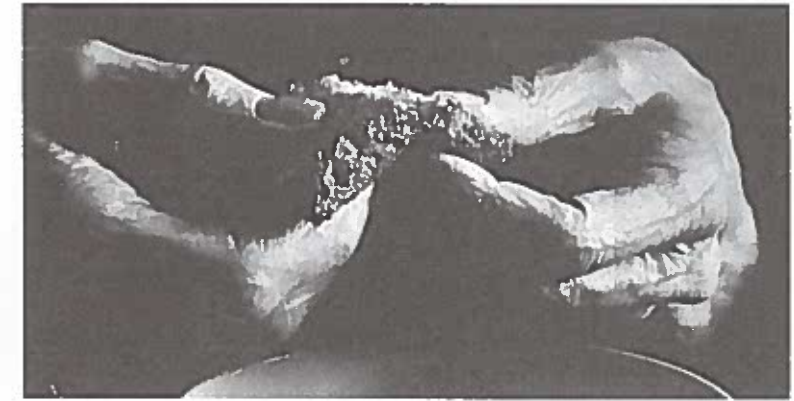
No, it takes a different kind of looking entirely, a looking away from ourselves to the promise. That's what the Spirit does: The Holy Spirit turns our eyes from ourselves to the God who has decided for us and to the promises God has made.

This God doesn't just say, "Don't worry," and then go away, leaving us in our fears. This God says, "I promise to be your God and give you everything good." And then God keeps his word, giving us not only daily bread, but the other things we need to live from day to day.

God doesn't just say, "Don't feel guilty," or "Don't be ashamed," either. God says, "Here's what I've done about your guilt. I have heaped it all on Christ and he's carried it for you, drowning all your sins and guilt in my grace." Or God says, "Here's what I think of you, with all of your shame: I love you more than you could love or hate yourself. You are mine."

God goes even further, speaking the Word day after day; God comes to you to be with you and each of us in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, reassuring us again with the Word and the bread and wine that he will never let us down.

When you look to this promise, then, realizing that all of God's gifts are for you, everything changes. You don't have to look to yourself for your daily bread and the other things you need to live each day. You don't have to pretend that you must



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earn everything, worrying night and day about how you can get and grab some more.

Hearing this promise, you can receive all that God gives you for what they are: gifts. And you can count on the God who raised Jesus from the dead to give you all you need. Then, when you see your daily bread as a gift, you can share it with others, passing on the gifts to other people who haven't received as much as you have.

The same thing happens with the word of forgiveness. When God says to you, "In my name all your sins are forgiven," you don't have to worry about what God thinks of you. God has told you that nothing will be held against you. You don't have to prove yourself to God, trying to whip up enough sincerity or goose bumps to show you deserve it. "I don't care whether you deserve it or not," God says, "you're mine—insincerity, doubts, guilt, shame, and all."

When God forgives you so freely, you can do the same with your neighbors. That's why Jesus put the Fifth Petition together the way it is: "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." Jesus isn't trying to make a deal with us. The God who promises doesn't make deals. God forgives us our failures to forgive, too. But as God forgives us, God intends the forgiveness to go through us to our neighbors. As that happens, it's a sure sign that the Spirit is at work, forgiving us as promised.

Realizing that God gives us all that we need as gifts makes all the difference, then. As long as the old sinner in us gives us eyes only for ourselves, our worries become whirlpools, pulling us in deeper and deeper until finally it seems we'll drown in anxiety. The old self has good reason to worry: God is putting that self in you to death.

But as the Spirit gives us ears and eyes for the promise, calling out the new you who looks to the promise, each day becomes a gift. We can then pray for our daily bread and ask God to forgive us our sins as we forgive others in the certainty that God will hear us and give us these gifts, as he has promised.

That's freedom—freedom from the old self's worry, guilt, and shame; freedom for the joyful service of God's people. There's no other freedom like it. God's promise makes every day new.



### THE SEVENTH PETITION

Save us from the sting of evil.

#### What does this mean?

God taught us how to die, but we risk in this prayer that God would watch over us and keep us as alive as the dead, the weak, and our sinful self may not deserve second chances like this world, church, and other great and beautiful things. And we pray this even though we know that we may not win the final victory.

### THE EIGHTH PETITION

And deliver us from evil.

#### What does this mean?

Thank to this inclusive prayer that we honestly believe would save us from any evil in body and soul, and at our last hour would mercifully welcome the souls of this world as theirs in heaven.