

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings from the parsonage! This month will have an odd combination: Ash Wednesday on Valentine's Day. That's right, Ash Wednesday falls on February 14th this year. It may seem strange to think of going on a date with ashes on your forehead but let's consider why we impose ashes. They remind us that from dust we are and to dust we shall return. We will return to the dust because we are sinners. All of us. None of us is righteous, no not one. Yet God, in His great love for us—for me and for you—He came to earth in the person of His Son Jesus Christ. Unfortunately today some sins are considered more “minor” than others. But if you've committed a “major” sin, and received God's forgiveness for it, you know how much He loves you. And really, that's how much He loves all of us—me and you—because all sin is worthy of the same amount of guilt and condemnation before God. God showed His love in that He chose to come and save you, a wretched sinner who deserves nothing more than to return to ashes. What better Valentine could you receive? Below, we continue our study of the Large Catechism.



Praying the

Lord's Prayer

Luther wrote: “We have now heard what we are to do and believe...Now follows the third part, how we are to pray. We are in such a situation that no one can keep the Ten Commandments perfectly, even though he or she has begun to believe. Besides, the devil, along with the world and our flesh, resists them with all his power. Consequently, nothing is so necessary as to call upon God incessantly and to drum into his ears our prayer that he may give, preserve, and increase in us faith and the fulfillment of the Ten Commandments and remove all that stands in our way and hinders us in this regard. That we may know what and how to pray, however, our Lord Christ himself has taught us both the way and the words, as we shall see (BoC, pp.440-441).”

Today, some devotion book writers claim that a person can have such strong faith that believers reach a point where they no longer need to pray. It seems that Luther would disagree. Instead, he writes that as people become believers, they realize more and more that the devil and

the world and their own flesh will cause them much grief in this life. What is more, why would Jesus, God Himself, give us a prayer if He had no desire that we pray to Him?

“But before (Luther explains) the Lord’s Prayer part by part (for us), the most necessary thing is to exhort and encourage people to pray, as Christ and the apostles also did. The first thing to know is this: It is our duty to pray because of God’s command. For we hear in the Second Commandment, ‘You are not to take God’s name in vain (BoC, p. 441).’”

Wait! What does taking God’s name in vain have to do with prayer? As Luther will explain in the next sentences, every command—which give “Thou shall not”’s—has an opposite “Thou shalt.” In this case, while you and I should not take God’s name in vain, we should “praise the holy name and...pray or call upon it in every need (BoC, p. 441).”

Recently my brother-in-law on Anna’s side did just that. Our new niece was about to get baptized and his wife and he had invited the grandparents and us to see it. Meeting at a restaurant, he led the prayer before the meal. Once he finished, he saw me and voiced that he hoped it was an okay prayer. And it was. All prayer is talking to God and he did just that. Yet so often we might desire a more formal way of praying. That’s what the disciples desired from Jesus, so He gave them the Lord’s Prayer. Prayer is always acceptable—and commanded—whether it is the Lord’s Prayer or your own. As ones who have been saved by Jesus’ death and resurrection, and now that we have “heard what we are to do and believe (BoC, p. 440),” we pray to our Heavenly Father. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

Your brother and under-Shepherd in Christ,

Pastor Josh