

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings from the parsonage! As some of you may know, my wife Anna enjoys practicing karate. She is a double-black belt in Ishinryu karate. When she moved here from Quincy, she had hoped to find an Ishinryu dojo nearby. Unfortunately she wasn't able to find one. But she did learn that a Kempo dojo would be opening in St. Peter last fall. Since beginning Kempo, she has advanced to the yellow belt and is working toward a purple belt. The reason I mention this is that karate, whether Ishinryu or Kempo, requires the learning of many different forms and katas (series of moves). She has shared with me that Ishinryu's moves and Kempo's are similar in some ways but different in others. In order to become an expert at either, then, one must learn the precise forms and katas. That is karate, which not everyone has to learn. But what about prayer? Are there certain forms which must be learned in order for God to hear us? That's what Luther will be discussing as we continue through our study of the Large Catechism in the Book of Concord.



Last month we read how God commands us to pray and promises to hear us. Luther continues: "You can hold such promises up to him (that is, God) and say, 'Here I come, dear Father, and pray not of my own accord nor because of my own worthiness, but at your commandment and promise, which cannot fail or deceive me.' Those who do not believe such a promise should again realize that they are angering God, grossly dishonoring him, and accusing him of lying.

"Furthermore, we should be encouraged and drawn to pray because, in addition to this commandment and promise, God takes the initiative and puts into our mouths the very words and approach we are to use (BoC, p.443)."

As we have already covered, one concern we might have with praying is wondering whether God will hear us on account of our sin. But as Luther pointed out, God has not only commanded us to pray, but has also promised to hear our prayers on account of our Lord Jesus. Another concern that is often raised about praying, though, is what form to use. You might hear, or might have even said yourself, that you don't know how to pray, or that another's prayer is somehow more acceptable to God because of the way that that other person prayed. Here Luther encourages us once again that God promises to not only hear us, but even to give us the "very words and approach we are to use."

One might wonder where Luther is coming from with such a quote. To this, one has simply to turn to a couple passages. In the Gospels, our Lord Jesus—God Himself—taught us to pray the Lord's Prayer. Why should God give us a prayer if He was going to refuse to hear it? Secondly, one might turn to Romans 8:26-27 where God speaks through His servant Paul to tell us that His own Holy Spirit will convey the messages of our prayers to forms which God will hear and answer. God tells us: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

"In this way we see how deeply concerned (God) is about our needs, and we should never doubt that such prayer pleases him and will assuredly be heard. So this prayer (the Lord's Prayer) is far superior to all others that we might devise ourselves. For in that case our conscience would be in doubt, saying, 'I have prayed, but who knows whether it pleases him or whether I have hit upon the right form and mode?' Thus there is no nobler prayer to be found on earth, for it has the powerful testimony that God loves to hear it. This we should not trade for all the riches in the world (BoC, p.443)."

So dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we have the assurance that God not only desires to hear our prayers but also that He has given us the words and form to do it. It is true that we are poor, miserable sinners, but because of the love of God found in our Lord Christ Jesus, we have the forgiveness of sins and the assurances both of life everlasting and that God will always gladly hear our prayer. For this it is our joy, privilege, and duty to thank Him, praise Him, and pray to Him! In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Your brother and under-Shepherd in Christ,

Pastor Josh