Pastor Keith E. Wiens February 19, 2012
Text: None Epiphany 7

A CONFIDENT PRAYER

We have been studying the Lord's Prayer. We have learned, that while the prayer is brief, it is a very large prayer! In this prayer Jesus teaches us to pray about really big concerns, matters of life and death.

We see that again today as we study the Sixth and Seventh Petitions. So let's turn to the Sixth Petition and let's read it along with the Catechism's explanation.

Save us from the time of trial. What does this mean? *It is true that God tempts no one, but we ask in this prayer that God would preserve and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great and shameful sins, and that, although we may be attacked by them, we may finally prevail and gain the victory.*

In the Fifth Petition we ask God to forgive our sins. And God does, fully and completely, for the sake of Jesus who died on the cross for us. As long as we live, though, we struggle with faith and are tempted to sin and turn away from God.

And often, the most severe attacks on our faith come when tragedy or misfortune strikes. It may come through a terminal disease. It may come through the devastation of a tornado. It may come through the death of a child. It may come through disillusionment with the church. Or it may come like in the Book of Job when Job lost everything. It comes when life makes no sense and we are tempted to turn away from God.

In the Catechism, Luther declares there are three forces which seek to drive us from God - our flesh, the world, and the devil. Our flesh is that part of us which is filled with selfishness and all sorts of sinful desires. The world around us is full of violence and injustice, hatred, envy, and lust for luxury, fame, and power. The devil baits and badgers us, seeking to tear us away from faith, hope, and love and drive us to despair and unbelief.

In the time of trial, God seems hidden, and we feel like Jesus, alone in the wilderness with Satan, abandoned on the cross, taunted by all. How can we survive when our flesh, the world, and the devil are all driving us away from God?

Mere human faith and willpower cannot survive such trial. Indeed, only one faith survives it - the faith of Jesus, the faith which bore him through the cross and the grave to the resurrection on Easter morning. In the hour of trail, we survive by holding on to Christ and praying, "lead us not into temptation." Jesus is alive and he is with us, even in our darkest hours. He and he alone can save us in the time of trial. And he does!

Let's turn now to the Seventh Petition. Let's read it along with the Catechism's explanation.

And deliver us from evil. What does this mean? *We ask in this prayer, as in a summary, that our Father in heaven may deliver us from all kinds of evil - affecting body or soul, property or reputation - and ast last, when our final hour comes, may grant us a blessed end and take us by grace from this valley of tears to himself in wish.*

Evil threatens in many ways. Evil lurks in the stranger who stalks a victim. Evil is on the move when violence breaks out against women or children. Evil is present in the world as tyrants wage war in order

to maintain power and control. Evil takes the form of racism, sexism, and all the other "isms" which rob people of their dignity and worth. Evil is real and it is very, very powerful.

On our own we cannot defeat the power of evil. So we must pray, "Deliver us from evil." God hears our prayer and sends us One who is more powerful than sin and evil. It is Christ, who faced the full fury of evil when he was arrested and put to death. Did evil win the day? It appeared to be so, but then came the resurrection. Christ prevailed against evil and Christ will deliver us, as well.

God has promised to help us! That is why we pray and that is why we conclude the Lord's Prayer with words of praise. Let us read the Conclusion to the prayer, along with the Catechism's explanation.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen. What does this mean? *That I should be certain that such petitions are acceptable to and heard by our Father in heaven, for God himself commanded us to pray like this and has promised to hear us. "Amen, amen" means "Yes, yes, it is going to come about just like this."*

"Amen," we say at the end. "Let it be so." We end the prayer praising God and confident that God will hear us and answer our prayer in ways that will be good for us. We can dare to be so upbeat and confident because God has promised to hear us and help us. Our confidence comes not from our praying, even praying such a perfect prayer as the Lord's Prayer. No, our confidence comes from God! Jesus, himself, is our guarantee that God will be good and merciful to us!

What a powerful prayer this is! What a huge, huge prayer this is! It is the Lord's Prayer, the prayer Jesus himself teaches us to pray. As we pray, God draws us close and God hears us and comes to our aid! And so we pray with confidence!