

LESSONS

1st Lesson: Psalm 67

1. God be gracious to us, and bless us; and cause His face to give light upon us; Selah. 2. That Thy way may be known in the earth, Thy salvation among all nations. 3. Let the peoples confess Thee, O God, let the peoples confess Thee, all of them. 4. Let the nations be glad and sing aloud, for Thou shalt judge the people uprightly, and the nations, into the land wilt Thou lead them. Selah. 5. Let the peoples confess Thee, O God; let the peoples confess Thee, all of them. 6. Then the earth will give her produce; God, our God, will bless us. 7. God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.

2nd Lesson: Matthew 6: 5-13

5. And when thou prayest, thou shall not be as the hypocrites; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may appear unto men. Amen I say unto you that they have their reward. 6. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy chamber, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father who sees in secret shall recompense thee in what is manifest. 7. And when you pray, do not speak on and on as the gentiles, for they think that they shall be harkened to for their many words. 8. Be not ye therefore like them; for your Father knows what things you need before you ask Him. 9. In this way, therefore, pray ye: Our Father who art in the heavens, hallowed be Thy name; 10. Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done, as in heaven so upon the earth. 11. Give us this day our daily bread. 12. And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors; 13. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for Thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory forever. Amen

3rd Lesson: True Christian Religion 113:6

We [angels] are from the community in heaven known as Michael. We have been sent to visit you, and enquire whether you who are gathered here have any religion or not. For the idea of God enters into every part of religion, and it is this which establishes a link with God, and that link is the means of salvation. We in heaven recite that prayer [Lord's Prayer] every day, just as people on earth do; but then we do not think of God the Father, since He is invisible, but we think of Him in His Divine Human, since in this He is visible. In this you call Him Christ, we call Him the Lord; thus the Lord is our Father in the heavens. The Lord too taught that He and the Father are one, that the Father is in Him and He is in the Father; that he who sees Him, sees the Father; and that no one comes to the Father except through Him. He also taught that it is the Father's will that people should believe in the Son; that he who does not believe in the Son will not see life; rather the wrath of God remains upon him. From these passages it is clear that the Father is to be approached through the Son and in Him. For that reason too He also taught that all power in heaven and on earth was given to Him. The Prayer says, "Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come" and we have proved from the Word that the Father's name is His Divine Human, and that the Father's kingdom comes when the Lord is directly approached, and not at all

when God the Father is directly approached. So too the Lord told His disciples to preach the kingdom of God, and this is what is meant by the kingdom of God.

S E R M O N

The Lord's Prayer: Our Father In The Heavens (Part 1 of 2)

A Sermon By
Rev. Michael E. Ferrell

Our Father who art in the heavens, hallowed be Thy name. Matthew 6: 9

Introductory Ideas:

The Lord's Prayer has become a landmark signature that distinguishes Christians from people of other faiths. This Prayer is one of the basic, foundational tenets of our religion. For centuries Christians – children, the young and old, everyone – have learned this Prayer and can recite it word for word. Praying the Lord's Prayer is comforting, whether in the early morning hours, at evening time, at resurrection services, or at the opening of meetings. The Lord's Prayer is appropriate and quite fitting for any event where people have gathered together for a common cause.

Prayer gives life to our spiritual growth. In speaking to God in prayer we may kneel, close our eyes, clasp our hands together and speak verbally or silently in our hearts. But it is not only the words we speak but our affections. Filled with a spirit of reverence, a person may raise his hands or even prostrate himself on the ground before God. As long as we're sincere in our prayer, any outward gesture can symbolize our humility and submission to the Lord.

The Sacred Scripture of the Old Testament contains countless examples of people praying to God: Abraham prayed for Abimelech (Genesis 20:17); Moses prayed for forgiveness of the people after they made the golden calf (Exodus 32: 32); Gideon prayed that the Lord would not depart from him (Judges 6:18); Hannah prayed for a male child (1 Samuel 1: 11). And there are others: the people of Israel, David, and Solomon, the prophets, and many others who prayed to God for different reasons and in various situations.

The Lord's Prayer:

It was when He was in the world and during the Sermon on the Mount the Lord taught people how to pray. It is as if people had not prayed to God before. Surely in times past the Lord heard the prayers of His people. But people needed to learn how to pray and eventually come to realize the underlying significance of prayer. In His mercy the Lord teaches us that prayer is an opportunity to open our souls and commune with Him. In prayer we can raise our hearts and minds to the Lord so He can feed us, forgive our sins, direct our footsteps, and deliver us from

evil. The Lord's Prayer serves the use of directing our loves and thoughts to the Lord but not for His glory but for our salvation. The Heavenly Doctrine teaches that:

Love Divine consists in desiring worship and glory...for the sake of man and his salvation; for he who worships the Lord and gives glory to the Lord is in humiliation; and what is his own departs from the man who is in humiliation; and insofar as this departs, so far the Divine is received" (AC 10646:3).

When from a heart of humility we pray the Lord's Prayer, He can lead us to discover that in offering up our souls the warmth of heavenly Divine love may descend and dwell within us. In offering ourselves to the Lord in prayer, we permit Him to open the higher regions of our mind. Then He may infill us with His Divine truths that satisfy our hunger to know that the Lord provides the necessities for our natural life and most assuredly for our spiritual life. The Lord taught the people the Lord's Prayer in the hope that they may realize that He hears our supplications, knows our needs and will have mercy upon us. He gave us the Lord's Prayer for the sake of our salvation.

The Lord's Prayer is more than the mere words. This Prayer is the most powerful of all supplications a person can make to the Lord. It is important that a person understand the nature of the Prayer beyond the mere words for two reasons, as is evident in the Heavenly Doctrine: First, "with man there are more things in it [Lord's Prayer] in proportion as his thought has been opened toward heaven" (AC 6619). This can be true of everyone who is undergoing reformation and regeneration. Everyone who is obeying the Lord (loving the Lord and neighbor, shunning evils, serving heavenly uses) makes it possible for the Lord to open their spirit to heaven.

On the other hand, the second reason for understanding the Prayer is that "there are fewer things in it [Lord's Prayer] in proportion as his [a person's] thought has been closed; for with those whose thought has been closed, nothing more appears therein than the sense of the letter" (AC 6619). Therefore, let's be watchful that the Lord's Prayer does not become a hollow recitation that we recite from memory. It is useful to remember the words but the power of the Lord's Prayer is in its internal, spiritual meaning and what it is we are asking of the Lord.

Our Father:

Our primary focus of attention in the Lord's Prayer is first the Lord Himself. In praying this Prayer we must realize who it is we address our supplication. As we turn to the Heavenly Doctrine we see that "in heaven the Lord is the Father of all and loves all" (AC 2360). While in the natural sense we are to honor our father and mother, in the celestial sense our "Father" means our Lord Jesus Christ and our mother is the church (TCR 307). While some may pray to the Father, in the name of the Son (another God) and somehow omit the Holy Spirit, in the New Jerusalem we pray directly to the Lord Himself for He alone is God. Our Father is the Lord and not some other God or Father who is mysteriously one part of a three person Godhead. In our prayer to God, our Father, we pray to the Lord our Savior Jesus Christ as He is presently this very moment in His Divine Human.

In praying the Lord's Prayer, like the angels "we do not think of God the Father, since He is invisible, but we think of Him in His Divine Human, since in this He is visible" (TCT 113:6). The Gospels chronicle story of the Lord's life here on earth. The Gospels present us with a visual image of a Man, the Lord Jesus Christ in the world teaching and performing wonderful miracles. The Divine God Himself in Human form "was made flesh, and dwelt in a tabernacle among us" (John 1: 14). In the New Church, the crown of all churches, we "worship one visible God in whom is the invisible" (TCR 787). But God manifest Himself before us as a Divine Person in truly human form. He reveals Himself in His Word, in our minds and in our life. This visible God is the Lord Jesus Christ who is our Father in the heavens.

While in the world the Lord appeared to make a distinction between Himself and His Father. He often prayed to His Father. The Heavenly Doctrine reveal intriguing truths about the Lord so that we may correctly understand the relationship between the Lord and His Father: "the Lord adored and prayed to Jehovah His Father...as if to one different from Himself, although Jehovah was in Him" (AC 1999:2). And "when He spoke with Jehovah it was as it were with another; when yet He spoke with Himself" (AC 1815: 2). As the Lord said, "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30). And so, like the angels who daily pray the Lord's Prayer, every time we pray we may say likewise that "the Lord is our Father in the heavens" (TCR 113:6).

In the Heavens:

Yes indeed the Lord dwells in the heavens. His heavens are His kingdom in the spiritual world where His Divine flows into the angels and makes heaven. As the Heavenly Doctrine tells us, it is the Lord's Divine that makes heaven (HH 78, HH 125). In the heavens the Lord is the "Most High" above the heavens. The Heavenly Doctrine describes an image of the Lord as "seen as a sun, not in heaven, but high above the heavens; and not directly overhead or in the zenith, but before the faces of the angels at a middle height" (HH 118).

Miraculously the Lord makes Himself present before the faces of the angels which ever way they may turn. Once again, our Father in the heavens is the Lord Jesus Christ. In the beginning, the very purpose of creation is that there would be an angelic heaven from the human race (DLW 329). And now this day the Lord continues to dwell in heaven among the angels.

As regards people in the world, the Lord our Father in the heavens, however, is not afar off or distant and detached from humanity. He dwells in His heavens within us. The Lord teaches in the Word that "man's interiors are what receive heaven. So far, therefore, as his interiors receive heaven man is in respect to them a heaven in least form" (HH 99). Our Father in the heavens is the Lord Himself within the interiors of our souls since the Lord is heaven and it is our interiors that receive Him (HH 313). In creating humans in His image, the Lord formed our interiors for the reception of heaven. The Lord created us so that, like a mirror, we may receive His image of heaven within us.

We know from the Heavenly Doctrine that “so long as a man is in this world, he is midway between hell and heaven: hell is below him, and heaven is above him” (Life 19, Life 69). Hell is evil. And evil derives from looking outward to the world and self. On the other hand, heaven is above. Heaven is within us, within the higher region of our souls. We turn ourselves to heaven when we love the Lord and the neighbor.

The Lord our Father in the heavens is nearby. While He is our Father in the heavens of the spiritual world of the angels, at the same time He is present in the world of our spirits, in the spiritual part of human nature that can receive His kingdom of heaven. While the Lord dwells so softly and silently in our interiors, He endeavors to flow into souls and then our minds. Because, as the Heavenly Doctrine teaches, “the Divine is indeed in every man, but is variously veiled by each” (DLW 147), the Lord says “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with Me” (Revelation 3: 20).

The Lord in the heavens of our souls where He dwells seeks to descend and reveal Himself. As we open ourselves to Him He comes and reveals Himself and thereby gives us consciousness that there is a God and that He, the Lord is our God and Father. When we pray “our Father in the heavens” we pray the Lord that He descend and reveal Himself to us that we may appreciate His holiness.

Hallowed Be Thy Name:

And now the name of God. In the Lord’s Prayer we petition the Lord that His name is hallowed, or holy. The name of God is His quality (AC 6280:5). And the Lord’s name or quality “is everything good and true in the Church” (AC 9674:2). In the highest sense the Lord’s name is His Divine Human (AR 692). We must note however that the Divine qualities of the Lord exist in and of themselves apart from our prayer to the Lord. The Heavenly Doctrine teaches that “the Divine is not man's but is something adjoined to him” (DLW 60:2). The Lord is holy separate and apart from us. His holiness does not derive from man. And so we consider what it can mean when we pray “hallowed be Thy name”

When we pray “hallowed be Thy name” our petition is that the Lord strengthens our acknowledgment of His Divine Human. We implore the Lord to fortify our faith in Him, that our image of Him as a visible Human God provides our inspiration to approach Him each and every day. Our prayer is that the Lord opens our eyes to see Him more clearly in His Word and in our life of heavenly uses.

We know from the Heavenly Doctrine that man cannot enter heaven “until he acknowledges at heart that nothing of good or truth is from himself, but all from the Lord, and that whatever is from himself is nothing but evil” (AC 5758). Our supplication to the Lord also is that He continues to lead us in acknowledging that He alone is good and truth; that He is the source of all

that is of love and wisdom. In order that we may truly admit that the Lord alone is holy we must be willing to repudiate all that is evil and false.

When we pray “hallowed be Thy name” we’re asking that the Lord help us in nurturing and protecting His good and truth with us so we do not profane them. The Lord is holy with us so long as we show reverence for the things of heaven. The Lord is holy with us when we use the goods and truths of the church in service of the Lord and neighbor. And finally, the Lord is holy with us when we cooperate with Him in giving us a new name – in creating us anew.

Concluding Ideas:

One fundamental reason for praying the Lord’s Prayer is because this Prayer helps us focus upon the Lord. We know that as the Lord is the Word, He is present in the Word (AC 3454, AC 4060:5). It is quite remarkable that regarding the spiritual realities and details of the Lord’s Prayer, the Heavenly Doctrine tells us “that the Lord is present in every one of them” (AC 6476). When we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we thereby approach and come near to the Lord Himself.

We cannot omit prayer from our spiritual life. Prayer is vital to our salvation because of what we need: acknowledgment of the Lord; strength to overcome in temptation; forgiveness; rebirth; these and other things essential to our salvation. Above all we need the Lord’s coming. In the Lord’s Prayer we’re asking that the Lord come to us.

The Lord said, “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:18).

Amen.