

RIGHT THANKSGIVING IS INFORMED AND GUIDED BY THE WORD OF GOD

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

St. Paul writes to us,

All of you remain anxious for nothing, but in all things, by the prayer and the petition with thanksgivings let the requests of all of you be made known to God.¹

From the Entrance Hymn before this morning's Matins service until the first reading for the day, eight Psalms or portions thereof have been read, chanted, or sung, into our ears.² A portion of a Psalm was used to by us to respond to the readings for this day of National Thanksgiving. Following this sermon, the Psalms will be quoted a couple more times. The Psalms have been often called the "prayer book" of the Bible.

Prayer, right thanksgiving, in the Church, is informed and guided by the Word of God. The Psalms in today's Matins, as well as in the weekly Wednesday Vespers, follow patterns for prayer established in the Church approximately fifteen centuries ago. They have guided the faithful, from monastery, to congregational settings, to personal devotions, into giving right thanks to God for all His benefits to the faithful, and, to this fallen world alike. They prayer of the Church on this Day of National Thanksgiving is informed by this ancient practice (which in the Old Testament dates back some 3,000 years from today). In this morning Lord's Service we have been making requests to God for all peoples, nations, and tribes. The Holy Spirit working through the Word this day will to guide your personal prayers this day, from those which you have

¹Philippians 4:6.

²Entrance Hymn – Ps 107; Opening Versicles - Pss 51, 70; Psalmody – Pss 95, 67, 116; Office Hymn – Pss 103, 106

heard her, into those for all people, even those who cannot, because they are outside the Faith, pray rightly to the Father through the intercession of Jesus.

It is the prayer of this congregation that you will leave the Presence of the Lord today full of the Word of God, even before you fill yourself with God's gifts – the fruits of the harvest at your Thanksgiving dinners. We request that the Holy Spirit would guide you to give true thanks for the bounty gracing your table – according to MSN news this morning – food which has likely come to you to consume today from California, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, North Carolina, and Wisconsin.³ The Psalms today are given to lead you prayer and petition with thanksgiving. St. Paul says,

All of you remain anxious for nothing, but in all things, by the prayer and the petition with thanksgivings let the requests of all of you be made known to God.⁴

Most New Testament teaching about prayer is centered in encouraging corporate, or congregation prayer. Today is no exception. St. Paul, in his exhortation to turning from anxiousness, first mentions that which God gives to take away our anxiousness – our nervous expectations about any and all things. He call us to “the prayer,” that is, the Prayer of the Church. Throughout the generations, “the prayer” has been understood and taught as the “formal,” or “set” prayer of the Lord's congregations. We have records of such prayer handed down from era of the synagogue between 300 BC through AD 200. Such corporate prayers were adapted for Christian worship in the early New Testament Church. So, when we receive God's gifts with thanks, especially through

³ Internet. <http://local.msn.com/travel/slideshow.aspx?cp-documentid=254644726>. Accessed November 22, 2012.

⁴ *Philippians* 4:6.

the Psalm services of the Church – Matins and Vespers, we are praying with the Church of the ages, offering God’s Word back to Him in right petition with thanksgivings, making all our requests known to God.

Paul encourages us to petition God. We are to understand that, in making right petition before the Father, we are called forth as those who have been granted the right and privilege to approach the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We come as supplicant, beggars, before the Throne of Grace. We repeatedly cry out to the King, no matter how beautiful we sing, the three-fold prayer of the faithful for His grace. Following the pattern set by the faithful leper in today’s Gospel reading, we petition the Lord of the Universe for mercy, beseeching the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in that order, with the Kyrie. “Lord, have mercy! Christ, have mercy! Lord, have mercy!” ring out from our hearts, minds, and lips in a counter-to-the-American-spirit plea of self-abasement, humbleness, and trust in He who is greater than all our works, words, and deeds. After all, *God desires that [His] people would pray to Him in [the] faith, that He might grant them more than they request. Further, with regard to corporate prayer, God has revealed that whatever the Church asks according to His will He will grant to her.*^{5 6}

The petition of the Church catholic for God’s mercy we utter so regularly in the Lord’s Services in this place are more than rote words to be sung to get the service moving on to the “Our Father,” collects, benedicamus, and benediction (if some of those

⁵ 1 John 5:14-15.

⁶ Philippians 4:6-7. This entire section is a quote from my paper, “A MODEL OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE: BIBLICAL, CONFSSIONAL AND EVANGELICAL,” presented as a post-course project to Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Doctor of Ministry program, November 25, 2008.

words are unclear, you will be able to see them in your hymnal, in context, so that you can discern their meanings). In the threefold “Kyrie” we, as a congregation united by the Holy Spirit with all who rightly confess the Triune God, we petition God for mercy – especially for those who are outside the only saving Faith, that is, the Faith of Jesus.

God hears our petition for mercy. The proof of that bold declaration is seen with our eyes. This world still turns. The fruits of the earth still come forth, in abundance to feed every man, woman, and child each year. (That some do not have enough is not because God is not merciful. Lack of those things which people need for this body and life is a result of sin, in particular sin in humans, which prevents God’s good gifts from being distributed to those in need). St. Paul still declares:

All of you remain anxious for nothing, but in all things, by the prayer and the petition with thanksgivings let the requests of all of you be made known to God.⁷

God calls the Christian congregation to humbly honor Him with thanksgivings. He did not intend for this to be a once-a-year national event. That began by a declaration of President George Washington in 1789 in the United States. National Thanksgiving Day was re-established by presidential proclamation in 1863, even as the States which had been united were divided in war. Even so, God, through St. Paul, is calling His Church in all nations, beginning with the Church at Philippi long ago, to give thanks for all He graciously provides for everyone in this world, with our without human decrees.

⁷Philippians 4:6.

That is because the Christian Church, out of all the religions of the world, can actually offer humble prayers and supplications before the Lord with all thanksgiving, with the assurance that the Father hears them. Over all the faiths ever devised by the heart of fallen man, or revealed by the spiritual messengers of the devil, only the One Holy catholic and Apostolic Faith, gives us the means to approach the Father, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. That means is Jesus, the Christ.

We Christians are assured that God is great, merciful and loving, because we believe, teach, and confess that He has forgiven our sins in Christ before we even offer one prayer or petition. Through the Word of God, we have firm and full assurance that God has answered our prayers through Christ even before we utter our requests. We have an intercessor with the Good and Gracious Father, Jesus.

That our prayers may ascend to the Father rightly, He sent the Son into our flesh. God became one with us, though without sin, in the Person of Jesus. Jesus, true God, took our sin, took your sin, upon Himself. He carried that sin into death – including the sin of thinking that the Faith is something personal to you, and that your individual prayers stand apart and uniformed by the Prayer of the Church. From the collective prayer of Jesus' Church, founded and nurtured by His blood, on this Day of National Thanksgiving, as on every day, God hears the prayer of His faithful people for the sake of Jesus! He still petitions the Father on account of His death for us, and for the world. And the Father hears Him, and thus us as we offer our requests.

Our requests as a part of Christ's Church, are given to inform your requests of the Father. Here, your petitions are revealed to you, even as they are already known to God through Christ. *God has given prayer as His gift to those whom He has named His own. [You have learned and confess that] God's will is done even without the prayers of the Christians... Our prayers, offered to Him in Christ Jesus, are the instruments that God uses to strengthen us and keep us firm in His Word and in the Faith even to our own last day.*"⁸

It is on account of the great and terrible forces of evil that assails the faithful that the Lord has given the gift of prayer to the faithful. In themselves, Christians do not have enough strength to contest the devil, his minions, the world and even their own sinful flesh. Christian... prayer [is] a precious gift! God, who knows all things, understands what will be requested even before [we] ask. Yet, He desires [us to] pray that [we] may, in [our] petitions, yearning in [our] hearts to greater godly desires, open [our]selves to receive many good things from Him. Prayer does not change the mind of God, but changes the minds of those who pray (and those who hear such godly prayers) to be more like His mind...."⁹

Through the prayer of the Church, which is given to guide the prayers of the individual members of His Church, Christ still intercedes for His people. The prayer of the faithful is acceptable to God the Father. Therefore, in thanksgiving this day, we hold St. Paul's words close through the end of this Service and to our dinner tables this day and always:

⁸ Tappert, Theodore, ed. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959.

⁹ Philippians 4:6-7. This entire section is a quote from my paper, "A MODEL OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE: BIBLICAL, CONFSSIONAL AND EVANGELICAL," presented as a post-course project to Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Doctor of Ministry program, November 25, 2008.

All of you remain anxious for nothing, but in all things, by the prayer and the petition with thanksgivings let the requests of all of you be made known to God.¹⁰

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Day of National Thanksgiving (One-year series)

Daniel 8:1-10; Philippians 4:6-20; Luke 17:11-19

November 22, 2012

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA

¹⁰Philippians 4:6.