

## **GOD'S WORD AS THE PROPER OBJECT OF CHRISTIAN MEDITATION**

Hear again the Word of the Lord to His Church, that which has been planned to assist God's people in praying, reflecting upon, and struggling with and account of God's Word in our ears:

*And it happened in His being in someplace He was continually praying, as He ceased, someone from the disciples of Him said, "Lord, You must teach us to pray just as John also taught to his disciples."<sup>1</sup>*

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

Last Wednesday, many of us heard a sermon entitled, "God's Pattern for Theologians Begins with Prayer." It set the tone for our Advent series this year. It is one that focuses the hearers of the Word in this place on the centuries old threefold manner of studying theology: *Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio*. We translate those as: *Prayer, Meditation, and Temptation (or Struggle)*.

A Christian goes through those three disciplines when he or she, when you, hear, approach, and respond to God's Holy Word as a Christian. That drives us to receive God's Word as the proper object of Christian meditation. God's Word was, and continues to be, declared to humans. That is because we were made to speak His Word – to one another and back to Him.

As you Christians participate in that for which the Holy Spirit re-formed you to do, you come into your own. That is to say, the Word descends into your being to draw you into Christ. The Word you hear keeps you joined to His Body. The Word of God spoken, chanted, or sung by you the Holy Spirit uses to work and sustain faith through the knowledge that is proclaimed into your head! The earthy Word – human words guided by the Spirit of God – continues to be given for hearing by humans first formed from the dust of the earth.

This means that true Christian biblical heart-understanding of the Word of God begins and ends with God. Since faithful meditation on the Word of God begins with

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<sup>1</sup> *Luke 11:1.*

prayer to Him, it presupposes Faith. That is, only a person who is held fast in the Faith of the Christ Who has come – for us New Covenant people – only a believer may rightly meditate on God’s Word. That is because the believer has God indwelling in him or her. That is the breath of God, the Holy Spirit works through the Word in the faithful hearer of the Word to bring, “Ah Ha!” moments. These come as the center of one’s being is moved by Him, as the Word is heard leading us into greater knowledge, understanding, appropriation and confession of the Word.

Consider all of that as we reflect on the answer Jesus gave to followers who asked Him how to pray. Included in that request was an unspoken plea – that is, they wanted to learn to pray rightly before God. You hear that prayer, even as you speak its words, very often. At a minimum, you pray Jesus’ gift to those who would pray faithfully to rightly receive His Word – meditation – at every Divine Service, each Evening Prayer, Vespers, Morning Prayer and/or Matins you attend in this place. In addition, many of you – most I dare say – pray the Lord’s Prayer daily.

That being said, when was the last time you considered the manner and teaching that Jesus Himself gave when He handed over the Our Father? Whether you consciously thought about it or not, you did that, at a minimum, last Wednesday and today. Hear again how the Holy Spirit established Jesus’ Word concerning prayer that it might be delivered into the ears and hearts of believers:

*And it happened in His being in someplace He was continually praying, as He ceased, someone from the disciples of Him said, “Lord, You must teach us to pray just as John also taught to his disciples.”<sup>2</sup>*

First, we learn through hearing the Our Father text repeated – oral repetition is a basic tenant of biblical meditation – that Jesus was Himself beheld continuing in prayer. The disciples heard the Word of prayer of Him Who is the Incarnate Word, and asked to be taught the Word.

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 11:1.

Second, we should realize that the ancient faithful prayed out loud. Praying silently appears to have been an Early Church – post-Apostles, post-persecution – development. Silent prayer was so startling when it entered into Church practice that one of the Church Fathers observing his mentor silently praying was so overwhelmed that his spiritual father could pray as we say, “in his head!” Even so, the Word of God, He declares, is meant to be heard, to enter the ears to move to the heart – the inmost being of man – and from there out of the lips and into the Christian’s life.<sup>3</sup> Think about how Jesus began to answer the disciple’s request for right prayer, as He says:

*He said then to them: “When all of you may pray, you all must say...*

Jesus then goes on to use six Old Testament and one Inter-Testamental verses to form His prayer for His disciples’ use. That is in Luke’s Gospel. In Matthew’s more complete account, Jesus uses at least ten Old Testament verses, and four Inter-testamental verses to mold His prayer for forming His disciples into the image of godly prayers. In doing that the Lord’s Prayer is the divine example of biblical meditation.

Now, reflect on the emphasis which Jesus gives as He concludes His teaching on right prayer in today’s text:

*How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to the ones continually asking Him?<sup>4</sup>*

Did you note that which Jesus did **not** teach about rightly meditating upon and reflecting the Word to the Father? Nowhere in the text, or its parallel in St. Matthew’s Gospel, are any instructions about deep breathing, holding a particular posture or entering into a place of sensory deprivation. Biblical meditatio is not divine navel gazing!

Think about what the Word declares about meditation before God. Jesus actually teaches that it is done corporately, beginning with prayer. That is, He uses plurals in the prayer. These we translate, “all of you,” or, “you all,” or, if you want the best English as it may be expressed in contemporary language, “all y’all.”

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Deut. 6:4, 9:1, 12:28; Is. 34:1; Lk. 16:31; Jn. 12:47, 14:24; Rom. 10:17; Rev. 2:7, 11, 29; 3:6, 13, 20, 22; etc.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 11:13b

We have already begun to learn anew what biblical meditation is and can be. You who are regular in receiving God's gifts already are quite adept at Meditatio. The orders of the Lord's Services actually lead us into meditation on the Word. We hear the Word, and we respond to the Word. The Word begins, continues, and ends the Lord's Services to us. The repetition of the Word is just what the Holy Spirit uses to drive it into our hearts – that is deep into our consciousness and consciences.

In reality, the Word is heard as it is preached into the conscience of the believer. As you hear God's Word, the attitude of your heart, your inner man, is the vehicle through which the Holy Spirit moves you to receive the Word. The Christian's heart attitude helps him or her hear the Word as either conviction, condemnation and killing of the Old Adam, or as acquittal, atonement and enlivening of the New Man in the believer. To help grasp that reality with the head first and then the heart, let us apply the ministerial (supporting) use of human reason and intellect concerning these words of Jesus:

*And You must forgive us our sins,  
For we ourselves continue to forgive everyone indebted to us;  
And lead us not into temptation.*<sup>5</sup>

You, dear Christian, know those words expressed in other forms. If you hear them with a heart that needs killing, you begin to question them in an ungodly manner. Those petitions begin with a demand. If you are falsely humbly, you might think something like this, "I am not going to demand anything of God!" If you are falsely holy, you could reflect, "well, I am not a sinner, for I have not killed anyone, cheated on my spouse, stolen anything," or, "hey, I am regular in Church attendance, therefore I keep the first three commandments." You hear the petitions and figure you are keeping them, so why think about them all that much, just get the words out and move on with the service!

If, on the other hand, as you hear and reflect that text with a broken and contrite heart, you realize that you are a sinner. You recognize that you often fail to forgive those who owe sin-debts to you. You discover that you do blame God for whatever may be

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 11:4.

tempting you lately. You hold such thoughts as, “well, God made me this way, so I can’t help it I desire fill-in-the-blanks.”

It is then that your meditation on the text turns you to Christ as your answer. You remember the promise the Lord attaches to the Our Father, namely, just *how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to the ones continually asking Him*.<sup>6</sup> As that occurs to you, that “Ah Ha Moment” leads you to realize that orally praying the Our Father as part of the all y’all of the Church means that the Holy Spirit is actually working faith in your heart.

Hear with your head that which you even now know in your heart – meditation on the Word of God is most clearly done as an “outward ritual enactment.”<sup>7</sup> This begins in the Lord’s Services. It flows from there into the Christian’s life. You see, the desire for God’s Word, which the Holy Spirit works in the believer, is the foundation upon which Christian meditation is built. It is why you Christians are truly here at this Lord’s Service. It is why you take time for daily devotional readings – ones in which you recline as it were – in the Word of God which comes forth from your mouth.

For years, here, you have been encouraged to use the Morning and Evening prayers set forth in the *Small Catechism*. You have been exhorted to read daily devotions out loud, using the simple Word of God in various formats. Those of you who have taken our Adult Instruction and Refreshment classes have been called to read the Scriptures out loud to yourself – particularly the Psalms. In fact, today, I beseech you to set time aside, first in prayer for the Holy Spirit, then in the reading of just one Psalm, the first one. As you hear its words, the Spirit will guide you into understanding of Whom the Psalm first speaks. Then, as you repeat the verses, you will discover yourself in them – your sins, and your need for the Savior. From that, you may be led to parallel verses that further illumine the text’s meaning for your inner life of the Faith.

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 11:13b

<sup>7</sup> Pless, John. *Luther’s ‘Oratio, Meditatio, and Tentatio’ as the shape of Pastoral Care for Pastors*. Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Quarterly 80, 2016.

Put the words of Psalm one out. Hear them with your ears. Discover that which the Holy Spirit will bring to your consciousness, as He, through them, relieves your conscience. Continue to wrestle with that Psalm, perhaps as you fall asleep tonight, and rejoice as those struggles build you into the image of Christ. Remember, God's Word heard is the proper object of Christian meditation.

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

Advent II (Catalina Lutheran Church's *Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio* Wednesday Advent Series)

Psalm 50; Psalm 16; Philippians 4:4-9; Luke 11:1-13;

December 13, 2017

*Pastor Michael A. Merhouse*

***Soli Deo Gloria***

TRANSLATION, FIRST DRAFT:

*And it became in the to be His in place some He was continually praying, as He ceased, he said, someone from the disciples of Him, "Lord, You must have taught us to continue to pray just as also John he taught to the disciples of him."<sup>8</sup>*

*He said then to them: "When you all may pray, you all must say:*

*O Father*

*It must have been treated as holy the Name of You*

*It must have come the kingdom of You<sup>9</sup>*

*The loaf of us the daily You must give to us the one according to day<sup>10</sup>*

*And You must have forgiven us the sins of us,*

*Then for these we continue to forgive everyone continually owing to us;*

*Then not You may have led into us into temptation.<sup>11</sup>*

*Then He said to them; Who from you all will have beloved one and he will go to him middle-of-night and he may have said to him, "O beloved one, You must have lent to me three loaves,<sup>12</sup> because beloved one of me became alongside from way toward me and not I continue to have that which I will set before him."<sup>13</sup>*

*Then that one from within he having answered he may have said; "Not to me troubling work you continue to make; it is the door having been locked and the children of me with me in to bed remain; not I continue to have power resurrecting to give to you."<sup>14</sup>*

*I continue to say to you all, if then not he will give to him resurrecting on account of the one to be beloved of him, on account certainly by the lack of feeling of shame of him he having risen he will give to him whatsoever he continues to need.<sup>15</sup>*

*Then also I to you all I say, "You all must continue to ask, and it will be given to you all, you all must continue to seek, and you all will find, you all must continue to knock and it will be opened to you all,"<sup>16</sup>*

*For everyone to the one continually asking he will receive and to the one continually seeking he will find and to the one knocking to him it will be opened.<sup>17</sup>*

*Someone and from you all to the father he asks the son fish, and against fish snake to him he will give?<sup>18</sup>*

*Or also he will ask egg, he will give to him scorpion?<sup>19</sup>*

*If then you all evil ones continually ruling ones you yourselves reason gifts good to give to the children of you all, how much greater the Father, the One of heaven He will give Spirit Holy to the ones continually asking Him.<sup>20</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup> Luke 11:1.

<sup>9</sup> Luke 11:2.

<sup>10</sup> Luke 11:3.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 11:4.

<sup>12</sup> Luke 11:5.

<sup>13</sup> Luke 11:6.

<sup>14</sup> Luke 11:7.

<sup>15</sup> Luke 11:8.

<sup>16</sup> Luke 11:9.

<sup>17</sup> Luke 11:10.

<sup>18</sup> Luke 11:11.

<sup>19</sup> Luke 11:12.

<sup>20</sup> Luke 11:13.

*And it happened in His being in someplace He was continually praying, as He ceased, someone from the disciples of Him said, "Lord, You must teach us to pray just as John also taught to his disciples."<sup>21</sup>*

*He said then to them: "When you all may pray, you all must say:*

*Father*

*It must be treated as holy Your Name.*

*Your kingdom must come.<sup>22</sup>*

*You must give to us our daily loaf.<sup>23</sup>*

*And You must forgive us our sins,*

*For we ourselves continue to forgive everyone indebted to us;*

*And lead us not into temptation.<sup>24</sup>*

*Then He said to them; Which one of you all will have a friend and he will go to him in the middle-of-the-night and say to him, "Friend, You must lend to me three loaves;<sup>25</sup> because a friend of mine came along from the way, and I do not have that which to set before him;"<sup>26</sup>*

*Then, that one from within he will answer and say; "Do not continue to make troubling work for me; the door has been locked and my children are with me in bed; I do not continue to have the power to rise up to give to you."<sup>27</sup>*

*I continue to say to you all, even though he will not rise up to give to him, on account of being a friend, certainly on account of the lack of his feeling of shame he, having risen, will give to him whatsoever he needs.<sup>28</sup>*

*Then also I say to you all, "You all must continue to ask, and it will be given to all of you, you all must continue to seek, and all of you will find, you all must continue to knock and it will be opened to all of you;<sup>29</sup>*

*For everyone continually asking, will receive; and the one continually seeking, will find; and the one knocking, to him it will be opened.<sup>30</sup>*

*Suppose that one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; instead of a fish, will he give to him a snake?<sup>31</sup>*

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<sup>21</sup> Luke 11:1.

<sup>22</sup> Luke 11:2.

<sup>23</sup> Luke 11:3.

<sup>24</sup> Luke 11:4.

<sup>25</sup> Luke 11:5.

<sup>26</sup> Luke 11:6.

<sup>27</sup> Luke 11:7.

<sup>28</sup> Luke 11:8.

<sup>29</sup> Luke 11:9.

<sup>30</sup> Luke 11:10.

<sup>31</sup> Luke 11:11.

*Or if he will ask for an egg, he will not give to him a scorpion?<sup>32</sup>*

*If you all then being evil you reason yourselves good gifts to give to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to the ones continually asking Him?<sup>33</sup>*

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<sup>32</sup> Luke 11:12.

<sup>33</sup> Luke 11:13