**The Sermon on the Mount (Part 11) + Weekly Devotion + 10.9.2024**

**Read Matthew 6:5-15**

*“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.” (Matthew 6:7)*

Jesus contrasts the prayers of His disciples with those of hypocrites (Matthew 6:5) and Gentiles (Matthew 6:7). Hypocrites are people who say one thing and do another. The word “hypocrite” comes from a word that was commonly used of actors on a stage. It referred to people dressed up in costumes and masks, pretending to be someone they weren’t. Gentiles refers to pagans (non-Christians) in this context. Jesus says that both hypocrites and pagans don’t pray as they should. They think that they’ll be heard by God because of their many eloquent words.

But those who don’t pray in faith pray in vain. God doesn’t hear their babbling. He doesn’t respond to their empty, long-winded repetitions. Instead, God hears the prayers of those who trust in Him. He answers those who seek His help in times of need.

In this passage, Jesus teaches us to pray the Lord’s Prayer. He tells us not to pray like the hypocrites and the Gentiles (pagans), but instead to pray like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name…” (Matthew 6:9). Christ provides us with the prayer of which Luther wrote, “There is no nobler prayer to be found upon earth” (LC III 23). Although we know it so well and pray it so many times, the Lord’s Prayer is indeed the very best prayer, for it was given to us by the Lord.

Luther also called the Lord’s Prayer “the greatest martyr” because “everybody tortures and abuses it; few take comfort and joy in its proper use” (AE 43:200). One of the downsides of knowing the Lord’s Prayer so well and repeating it so frequently is that we sometimes pray it thoughtlessly. We simply say the words without thinking about them and meditating upon them.

I find myself falling into this when I’m praying with the kids at bedtime. Sometimes Millie is squirming or chatting about something else while I’m trying to pray the Lord’s Prayer. It’s easy to get distracted while praying; the words can feel empty and meaningless.

God be thanked and praised that He hears and answers us even when our prayers aren’t as reverent as they could be! Thanks be to God that He delights in listening to us even when we get distracted. Were it not for Christ, God wouldn’t hear us and certainly wouldn’t answer us. We don’t deserve it in the least, but Christ has reconciled us to the Father by shedding His blood for us on the cross. Our sins are forgiven; we’re no longer separated from God. Our Father gladly hears and answers us when we pray!

Jesus was forsaken by His Father so that we would never be forsaken by Him. We can be certain that God hears and answers us when we pray, “Our Father, who art in heaven…”

Prayer: Father, thank You for listening when we come to You in prayer. Amen.