



## Epiphany Seattle Spiritual Formation Forum Series

# PRAYING IN FAITH

*Renovare Devotional Classics*  
*Sunday October 28<sup>th</sup> @ 10 a.m.*  
*Great Hall*



### Background

Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) is best known as the father of the Protestant Reformation. Born into a peasant family in Eisleben, Germany, Luther sought to better himself by becoming a scholar. However, at the age of twenty he suffered a deep anxiety about his own salvation and entered an Augustinian monastery to soothe his religious conscience. Soon afterward he felt called into the priesthood and was ordained in 1507. While serving as a professor of biblical literature at Wittenberg in 1512, he lectured on Paul's letter to the Romans, an exercise that shaped his theological thinking – especially concerning salvation. In 1517, he composed the famous ninety-five theses and nailed them on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg, registering his complaints with the Roman Catholic church and providing the impetus for the Protestant Reformation.

Luther was not only a brilliant theologian but also a man of deep piety. The following selection, compiled from three sources, demonstrates his insight into the subject of prayer. He was deeply influenced by the writing of St Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux. Luther's faith was lively, earthy, and practical; his logic was powerful; and his leadership skill unparalleled. As you read the following devotional selection you will be sitting at the feet of one of the most influential men in the history of

the Church. More importantly, his experience of God was deep and abiding.

Excerpts from *Table Talk*, "Epistle Sermon, Fourth Sunday in Advent" and "Treatise on Good Works"

#### 1. Prayer and Supplication

By "prayer" we understand simply formal words or expressions – as, for instance, the Lord's Prayer and the psalms – which sometimes express more than our request. In "supplication" we strengthen prayer and make it effective by a certain form of persuasion; for instance, we may entreat one to grant a request for the sake of a father, or of something dearly loved or highly prized. We entreat God by his Son, his saints, his promises, his name. Thus Solomon says, "Jehovah, remember for David all his affliction." And Paul urges, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God"; and again, "I...entreat you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ."

#### 2. Petition and Thanksgiving

"Petitioning" is stating what we have at heart, naming the desire we express in prayer and supplication. In the Lord's Prayer are seven petitions, beside prayer proper. Christ says: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" In "thanksgiving", we recount blessings received and thus

strengthen our confidence and enable ourselves to wait trustingly for what we pray.

### **3. Prayer Made Vigorous**

Prayer is made vigorous by petitioning; urgent by supplication; by thanksgiving, pleasing and acceptable. Strength and acceptability combine to prevail and secure the petition. This, we see is the manner of prayer practiced by the Church; and the holy fathers in the Old Testament always offered supplication and thanks in their prayers. The Lord's Prayer opens with praise and thanksgiving and the acknowledgement of God as a Father; it earnestly presses toward him through filial love and a recognition of fatherly tenderness. For supplication, this prayer is unequalled. Hence it is the sublimest and the noblest prayer ever uttered.

### **4. Unceasing Prayer**

There is no Christian who does not have time to pray without ceasing. But I mean the spiritual praying, that is: no one is so heavily burdened with his labor, but that if he will he can, while working, speak with God in his heart, lay before Him his need and that of other men, ask for help, make petition, and in all this exercise and strengthen his faith.

### **5. What to Expect from Prayer**

We should pray by fixing our mind upon some pressing need, desiring it with all earnestness, and then exercise faith and confidence toward God in the matter, never doubting that we have been heard. St Bernard said, "Dear brothers, you should never doubt your prayer, thinking that it might have been in vain, for I tell you truly that before you have uttered the words, the prayer is already recorded in heaven. Therefore you should confidently expect from God one of two things: either that your prayer will be granted, or, that if it is not granted, the granting of it would not be good for you."

### **6. Praying in Faith**

Prayer is a special exercise of faith. Faith makes the prayer acceptable because it believes that either the prayer will be answered, or that something better will be given instead. This is why James says, "Let him who asks of God not waver in faith, for if he wavers, let him not think that he shall receive anything from the Lord." This is a clear statement which says directly; he who does not trust will receive nothing, neither that which he asks nor anything better.

### **7. Jesus' Teaching on Prayer**

Jesus himself has said, "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11, KJV). And in Luke 11, he said, "Ask, and it shall be given; seek,

and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asks receives, everyone who seeks finds, and to everyone who knocks it shall be opened. For what father among you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone: or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give the Holy Spirit to all them that ask Him!"

Are we so hard of heart that these words of Jesus do not move us to pray with confidence, joyfully and gladly? So, many of our prayers must be reformed if we are to pray according to these words. To be sure, all of the churches across the land are filled with people praying and singing, but why is it that there is so little improvement, so few results from so many prayers? The reason is none other than the one which James speaks of when he says, "You ask and do not receive because you ask amiss" (James 4:3). For where is this faith and confidence is not in the prayer, the prayer is dead.

### **8. Laying the Need – Not Prescribing the Answer**

From this it follows that the one who prays correctly never doubts that the prayer will be answered, even if the very thing for which one prays is not given. For we are to lay our need before God in prayer but not prescribe to God a measure, manner, time, or place. We must leave that to God, for he may wish to give it to us in another, perhaps better, way than we think is best. Frequently we do not know what to pray as St Paul says in Romans 8, and we know that God's ways are above all that we can ever understand as he says in Ephesians 3. Therefore, we should have no doubt that our prayer is acceptable and heard, and we must leave to God the measure, manner, time, and place, for God will surely do what is right.

### **9. Sinning on the Left of the Right**

The true worshipers are those who worship God in Spirit and in truth. All who believe their prayers will not be heard sin upon the left hand against this Scripture in that they go far astray with their unbelief. But those who set times, places, measures, and limits for God sin upon the right hand and come too close with their tempting of God. So God has forbidden us to err from his commandment on either the left or the right, that is, either with unbelief or with tempting. Instead, we are to come to God in simple faith, remaining on the

straight road, trusting him, and yet setting him no bounds.

### 10. What Should We Pray For?

What are the things we should lay before the Almighty God in prayer? Answer: First, our personal troubles. In Psalms 32, David cried out, “You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance” (v 7, NIV). Likewise, in Psalms 142, “I cry aloud to the Lord...I pour out my complaint before him; before him I tell my trouble.” When we pray we should keep in mind all of the shortcomings and excesses we feel, and pour them out freely to God, our faithful Father, who is ready to help. If you do not know or recognize your needs, or think you have none, then you are in the worst possible place. The greatest trouble we can ever know is thinking that we have no trouble for we have become hard-hearted and insensible to what is inside of us.

### 11. The Ten Commandments

There is no better mirror in which to see your need than the Ten Commandments. In them you will find what you lack and what you should seek. You may find in them that you have a weak faith, small hope, and little love toward God. You may see that you do not praise and honor God as much as you praise and honor yourself. You may see that you do not love the Lord, your God, with all of your heart. When you see these things you should lay them before God, cry out to him and ask for help, and with all confidence expect help, believing that you are heard and that you will obtain mercy.

### 12. What a Great Gift We Have in Prayer

No one can believe how powerful prayer is and what it can effect, except those who have learned it by experience. It is important when we have a need to go to God in prayer. I know, whenever I have prayed earnestly, that I have been heard and have obtained more than I prayed for. God sometimes delays, but He always comes.

It is amazing that a poor human creature is able to speak with God’s high Majesty in heaven and not be afraid. When we pray, the heart and the conscience must not pull away from God because of our sins and our unworthiness, or stand in doubt, or be scared away. When we pray we must hold fast and believe that God has heard our prayer. It was for this reason that the ancients defined prayer as an *Ascensus mentis ad Deum*, “a climbing up of the heart unto God.”

### Bible Selection: Mark 11:22-25

<sup>22</sup> Jesus answered them, “Have faith in God. <sup>23</sup> Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. <sup>24</sup> So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

<sup>25</sup> “Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.”

### Extra Credit

During the week, practice one of the following exercises either individually or shared between spiritual friends:

1. Strive to be more honest in your prayer life this week. State what is in your heart; allow yourself the freedom to be who you are as you stand in the presence of God.
2. Try using Luther’s advice about not prescribing manner, measure, time, and place in your prayers. Learn the joy of faith that trusts God to answer your prayers in the best possible manner, measure, time and place.
3. Use the Ten Commandments in your prayer time. As Luther recommends, use them – as one who gazes into a mirror – to help you see your life more clearly.
4. Jesus connect prayer and forgiveness in an inseparable way, not only in the passage from Mark 11, but also in the Lord’s Prayer. This week make the forgiveness of others not merely a part of you prayers but an essential aspect of your life with God.

##

Epiphany is a Place of Gathering and Conversation  
Epiphany Parish is place where belonging takes precedence,  
and relationship is primary – relationships between  
individuals and their own innate gifts, among people, and  
between people and God

## Epiphany Promises You

Belonging over believing

Relationship is primary

Doubt is welcome

Conversion-free zone

No obligations, fees or expectations

## Contact Us

Epiphany Parish is on the corner of Denny and 38<sup>th</sup> Avenue in  
the Madrona neighborhood

[Street Address]

[City, ST ZIP Code]

Phone: 206 324 2573

Email: [epiphanyparish@epiphanyseattle.org](mailto:epiphanyparish@epiphanyseattle.org) or  
[sclemons@epiphanyseattle.org](mailto:sclemons@epiphanyseattle.org)