

Lent Wednesday 3 (3/22/2017)
Luther's Small Catechism
The Lord's Prayer
Romans 12:1-21

The Third Petition: Your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

What does this mean?

In fact, God's good and gracious will comes about without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may also come about in and among us.

How does this come about?

Whenever God breaks and hinders every evil scheme and will—as are present in the will of the devil, the world, and our flesh—that would not allow us to hallow God's name and would prevent the coming of his kingdom, and instead whenever God strengthens us and keeps us steadfast in his word and in faith until the end of our lives. This is God's gracious and good will.¹

Luther elaborates:

Such prayer must be our protection and defense now to repulse and vanquish all that the devil, bishops, tyrants, and heretics can do against our gospel. Let them all rage and try their worst, let them plot and plan how to suppress and eliminate us so that their will and scheme may prevail. Against them a simple Christian or two, armed with this simple petition, shall be our bulwark, against which they shall dash themselves to pieces. We have this comfort and boast: that the will and purpose of the devil and of all our enemies shall and must fail and come to naught, no matter how proud, secure, and powerful they think they are. For if their will were not broken and frustrated, the kingdom of God could not abide on earth nor his name be hallowed.²

The prayer, "Your will be done, on earth as in heaven," implies that the will of God has competition. Christian faith is not naïve; we don't shut our eyes to the evil at work to undermine God's life-giving purpose in the world. Staring it in the face, Martin Luther King, Jr. soberly observes:

¹ *Luther's Small Catechism*, 500 Years of Reformation edition, 37.

² Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, in *The Book of Concord*, 449.

Within the wide arena of everyday life we see evil in all its ugly dimensions. We see it expressed in tragic lust and inordinate selfishness. We see it in high places where men are willing to sacrifice truth on the altars of their self-interest. We see it in imperialistic nations crushing other people with the battering rams of social injustice. We see it clothed in the garments of calamitous wars which leave men and nations morally and physically bankrupt.³

We don't have to look past the front page to discover evidence of the "downward pull of evil," as King calls it – the destructive effect of heartless systems, systems in which we are so often implicated, and that resist God's purpose to bring about abundant life for all the world.

At the heart of the prayer Jesus teaches his followers is the petition that we be swept up into God's movement over against competing forces – that "God's good and gracious will" may "come about in and among us." **Gospel hope transforms us "by the renewing of our minds," to borrow the words of Saint Paul, "so that [we] may discern what is the will of God." And, anywhere goodness overflows from us, defying evil and freeing us from its grip, we become instruments of God's will, partners in bringing about the life God wants for us.**

Evil will not go quietly, but the heart of the Christian confession is that it will not have the final say. "We have this comfort and boast," Luther insists, "that the will and purpose of the devil and of all our enemies shall and must fail and come to naught, no matter how proud, secure, and powerful they think they are." King professes the same hope, but with different words: "The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice."⁴

³ "The death of evil upon the seashore," *Strength to Love*, 77-8.

⁴ <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlktempleisraelhollywood.htm>.