

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In our Epistle reading today, Saint Paul reminds us that we do not know how to pray as we ought. Perhaps St. Paul is rationalizing about Jesus teaching us the words to pray with in the Lord's Prayer...or could St. Paul along with Jesus be telling us that we don't know how to address the God we cannot fully comprehend? However, we close the prayer that our Lord taught us to pray with these very words:

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen

These words are the Benediction or the Doxology of the Lord's Prayer. These words are NOT part of the prayer that our Lord has given to us to pray. There is a document known as the *Didache* which is also known as The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations. This is a brief anonymous early Christian treatise which constitutes the oldest existing written catechism containing Christian ethics, instructions for rituals such as baptism and Eucharist, and Church organization. In other words, the *Didache* is the instruction manual for the order of our liturgy and this is where the Doxology or the Benediction to the Lord's Prayer is believed to be originated. Scholars believe that this Benediction or the Doxology of the Lord's Prayer is based on this passage from First Chronicles:

"Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all." (1 Chronicles 29:11)

For those familiar with the Catholic Mass, know that this benediction is not included in the Lord's Prayer when it is prayed. This is NOT to say who is right or wrong, it is nonetheless, the way we have been praying this prayer for quite a while.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory...what do we think of or what do we envision when we pray these words or reflect upon these words? What comes to mind? Perhaps we think of or imagine an omnipotent, glorious, and very powerful God. After all, throughout the Biblical narrative, God is portrayed as a God who can command the very elements of creation and then turn around and flood that creation and destroy all those in it. We hear of the destruction of cities like Sodom and Gomorrah due to our human wickedness. We hear throughout Biblical narrative, themes of devastation and destruction that serve as significant themes that undergird the consequences of our sin. The Biblical narrative serves to remind us of the sheer power and sovereignty of God. From the prophet Jeremiah we hear that God even gets tired of putting up with us:

You have rejected me, says the LORD, you are going backward; so I have stretched out my hand against you and destroyed you-- I am weary of relenting. (Jeremiah 15:6)

For the power and glory are God's but the narrative about this may be a bit frightening. Biblical narrative has painted God as mighty, as fearsome, and a very powerful God. But as frightening as God can seem, we are taught by Moses by the very commandments handed to him that there is only one God:

² I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ³ you shall have no other gods before me. ⁴ You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath,

or that is in the water under the earth.⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, (Exodus 20:2-5)

Our catechisms reflect this and teach us that we are to have no other gods and that we are to fear and love God. Along with that we are also taught that we are to trust God above all things.¹ Luther goes on to explain this in more depth about the First Commandment in the Large Catechism:

The intention of this commandment, therefore, is to require true faith and confidence of the heart, which fly straight to the one true God and cling to him alone. What this means is: “See to it that you let me alone be your God, and never search for another.” In other words: “Whatever good thing you lack, look to me for it and seek it from me, and whenever you suffer misfortune and distress, crawl to me and cling to me. I, I myself, will give you what you need and help you out of every danger. Only do not let your heart cling to or rest in anyone else.”²

But how do we cling to a fearsome and powerful God that frightens us? Just as the very Word of God convicts us of our sin, that same Word of God also saves us. And like the dual nature of God’s Word, God himself is mighty and powerful, but St. Paul reminds us that God is also gracious and gentle. Listen to the duality of God in Paul’s words to the church in Corinth:

^{9b} “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”
(2 Corinthians 12:9b)

God’s power is made perfect in weakness. In this exchange between God and Paul, we find Paul in Ephesus some two hundred miles from Corinth writing to them about boasting...something that seems to be at the center of our human nature. Ironically, we may not be so quick to boast about our boasting, regrettably, we all do it in so many different ways. It is the very element that drives our social media platforms, our politics, our religion, and has even saturated our mindset and the behavior of our culture. Boasting in such a way that is undergirded and distinguished by my facts and my philosophy, which are nothing more than my unproven opinion, my view, and my perspective because *I* don’t want to be informed nor do *I* need to be informed, *I* simply assume that *I am* informed. Simply put, the way I see it...your side is not like mine, or my rights are more important than yours, therefore, yours need to be like me, or we need to eliminate or cancel you or change you so you are just like me.

We all know this kind of boasting, we all partake in it with our judgments of others in order to elevate ourselves or to show our power, our might, and our assumed glory. This is nothing new, just look at Cain and Able, look at ourselves and how our faith is made manifest in the world...we prove our faith in our comparison and judgment of others. But God’s power, God’s mercy, and God’s faith in us is made perfect in weakness...weakness that is revealed on a cross and handed to us in a simple piece of bread and sip of wine.

Nonetheless, we are put off by this word “weakness” because it just doesn’t fit into our existential American paradigm...a paradigm that operates from the conditioned behavior of strength in

¹ Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. The Small Catechism, The Ten Commandments.: The First [Commandment], Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), page 351, par 1-2.

² Ibid. Pages 386–387, par 4.

winning and the weakness in loss. And we have reinforced this conditioned behavior in that we are strong self-made individuals with the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But so is that person who doesn't look like me, vote like me, live like me, or worship the way I think they should. The one screaming at about "my rights" has to see that others have the very same rights.

God's response to Paul about weakness is not that we lie down and become frail, feeble, or incapacitated. God is reminding Paul and reminding all of us of our human reality...that the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. Our foolishness, our weakness, and our very sin keep us pinned to the Lord because it is from these very places and situations where we find ourselves closest to God and clinging tightly to the grace and mercy that is in our foolishness, our weakness, and our sin...and this is where we experienced the sheer strength of God.

Looking at our Gospel lesson today, we can say that the grace and mercy of God is LIKE vulnerability. Today in our Gospel we have a series of parables from Jesus teaching us that the "kingdom of heaven is LIKE. We hear this six times in our appointed Gospel lesson. Jesus is not saying *what* the kingdom of heaven *IS*, he is informing us what it is like. Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like, is *ὁμοία* (ho-moy-ah) meaning that, it is, of the same nature as. The kingdom of heaven is of the same nature of a mustard seed, the same nature of yeast, the same nature of a hidden treasure or a merchant in search of fine pearls. The kingdom of heaven is the same nature of a fishing net that catches ALL KINDS of different fish.

Jesus is telling us that the kingdom of heaven is NOT these things but rather this is the nature of the kingdom of heaven seen in these things. Jesus is telling us what the core essence, the inherent character, and what basic qualities of the kingdom of heaven is like. He is trying to show us what the concept of His kingdom truly is and how this kingdom functions by its very makeup. He is showing us that the kingdom can be seen in common ordinary insignificant elements that are interactive right now in our lives.

Jesus is showing us that the kingdom of heaven is a causation of other things in our lives. The kingdom of heaven is like an insignificant mustard seed that grows and nurtures and cares for others. In other words, the kingdom of heaven when planted within us is the potential to become something significant before God, become something way beyond our human expectations...something that shelters, cares for, and nurtures others. The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that when mixed into our human nature along with our human sin raises us up beyond what we once were. The kingdom of heaven is a treasure of grace that we seek and is not taken nor found through our strength, it is the treasure before us buried in the vulnerable weakness of our very sin. The kingdom of heaven is before us today it is NOT *ὁμοία* (ho-moy-ah) it is NOT like or similar, nor is it of the same nature or of the same kind...the kingdom of heaven is before us and the master of the household has brought out His treasure and it is presented to us and handed to us in a simple piece of bread and sip of wine...it is God's power made perfect in weakness revealed to us in the body and blood of God's only Son. The treasure handed to us in this piece of bread and sip of wine is the very body and blood of God's only Son, it is God's treasure that makes what is old new, it is the seed that makes us righteous...it is the kingdom of heaven...where our sins are forgiven and we rest eternally.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.