

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fifth Sunday After Trinity, July 17, 2022

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 200:1-4, 454:1-3, 226:1-7, 457, 644

Lessons: Genesis 15:1-6, Hebrews 11:1-16, Luke 12:32-40.

Sermon Text: Romans 8:26-27.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Have you ever been at a loss for words? There may have been many possible reasons, but think for a moment of times when you have been so frustrated about something that you just didn't know what to say.

Well, sin can make us that frustrated. There are times when we want to ask God something in prayer – but we don't even know what to pray for. We know things are wrong in our lives but we aren't sure in our weakness of faith just how to approach and ask God and we aren't sure even exactly what we want to pray for.

But we find in our text a solution that will help us, and help set our minds at ease.

THE HOLY SPIRIT HELPS US IN OUR WEAKNESSES

- 1. When we don't even know what to pray for, the Holy Spirit prays for us.**
- 2. God the Father understands and hears these prayers.**

In its simplest, our text tells us that the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness when we don't know what we ought to pray for.

In the Apostolic Creed we confess that we believe in the Holy Ghost, and in the Nicene Creed we confess that he is “the Lord and Giver of Life, Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, Who spake by the Prophets.” And our text tells us more of what he does for us.

Time and again Christians find themselves at their wits' end, wondering what the will of God is for them in this or that situation. They find themselves lamenting, “If only I knew what the Lord wanted me to do; if only I knew what to pray for.” At such times the Holy Spirit steps in and does for us what we're at a loss to do for ourselves, as we read *“the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”*

In our last sermon we heard *“that the whole creation has been groaning”* as a result of the sins of mankind. Then we heard that the children of God were groaning or sighing: *“we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”* All this is a result of sin.

Here it is the Holy Spirit who is groaning, who is sighing – for us!

This is the personal presence of the Holy Spirit in us. He helps us in our weakness. He knows the will of God and how men ought to pray for it. He puts his power into all our praying and even puts our prayers into groaning – meaning thoughts and ideas that God the Father can plainly understand. His is a power which breaks the limits of our human speech and makes us cry “with sighs too deep for words.” He intercedes for us. He is our Counselor, our Comforter, our Intercessor, our Consoler, too.

Our prayers rise up all too feebly. The weariness of all things in this world infects us, too, as we read in Ecclesiastes 1:8: *“All things are wearisome, more than one can say.”*

This gift of God the Holy Ghost for believers has been called “the special supernatural care” of God. The Holy Spirit is present within the Christian to assist him in those moments of moral, physical, or emotional weakness. Frequently a follower of Christ confronts difficulties so insurmountable that he cannot even approach

prayer skillfully. He knows that he must approach God, but he may have already said – in words – all that he knows to say to God. In those instances, the promise is that the Holy Spirit ***“makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered”*** (King James Version) and that ***“The Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”*** (New International Version)

The Holy Spirit is making the intercession. The groans of the Holy Ghost might be translated “unspoken sighings.” In other words, the communication is nonverbal, involving no speaking of any kind.

We especially confess in Luther’s explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles Creed that it is only through the work of the Holy Ghost that we are made children of God, that we are converted, born again, and quickened – given spiritual life.

And the Spirit assists us in our prayers. It is the work of the Spirit within us that makes us children of God, able to pray to God as Abba, Father. We read earlier in this chapter: ***“those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”*** Romans 8:14-17

When we pray, we sometimes experience a profound sense of need. We realize how little we know, how ill-equipped we are even to pray properly. We cannot express adequately our love for God, our worship of Him, our sense of repentance, or even our requests to Him. We may be without words for our prayers, expressing our deepest desires with groans rather than words. Those groans, like the simple prayer “Abba” meaning “Father”, and which implies SO much, are the work of the Spirit within us, assisting us in our prayers, praying within us and for us.

We may be sure God will answer these prayers. God knows what those inarticulate groans mean.

How and why? The groanings of the Holy Spirit are understood perfectly by the one for whom they are intended: God the Father. The Father, who searches our hearts ***“knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will”***.

Remember, the “Saints” for whom the Holy Spirit intercedes are all those who are holy by their faith in Christ – in other words, all believers. Therefore, help in prayer is a service the Holy Spirit does for all Christians. That does not release us from God’s command and encouragement to pray, but it does cover for us when we pray poorly or too little. And unlike many of our bumbling prayers, the Holy Spirit’s prayers for us are always on target, always perfect, always ***“in accordance with God’s will.”***

Prayer not only goes to God; but in some sense, it also comes from God. The Spirit in our hearts, in our souls, enables us to pray and prays for us. The Spirit talks to God from within the believer. The implications of this for understanding the Spirit are important. This means the Spirit definitely is persona, is a person. Only a person can pray; a force or a power cannot. It means the Spirit is definitely distinguishable from the Father, for He prays to the Father. On the other hand, the Spirit is very truly God, just as the Father is, God the Father who understands fully and perfectly the meaning of the Spirit’s prayers. This is part of the mystery of the Trinity. This is One person of the Triune God speaking to another person of that Triune God, and he is doing it for us, in our behalf!

The Word of God here speaks of the Spirit who intercedes and interprets our needs, and of the Father who knows the mind of the Spirit, and of the risen Christ at the right hand of God who also intercedes for us. The whole idea of intercession is to have someone in a position of influence and power pleading your cause. Jesus Christ is sitting on the right hand of God interceding on behalf of humankind. Here we are told that in our daily struggles and weaknesses, the Holy Spirit is interceding very personally for us in all our weaknesses, when we don’t even know what to ask God for, and how to ask God and what words to use to ask God for what we need.

Remember that in the Lord’s Prayer Jesus himself taught us of six petitions for spiritual blessings, and only one petition – the fourth – for material blessings. Here the Holy Spirit helps ask for those spiritual blessings with unutterable groanings we can’t understand, but God the Father can.

The intercession of the Spirit is communicating with the Father on a level above the level of words. Within the Trinity, who know and understand each other perfectly, above any level of or type of communication known on earth, the awkward prayers of Christians are translated into the high and noble level of God Himself.

When Christians are so troubled as to find great difficulty in praying, the Holy Spirit is interceding for them with divine intensity (“groans”) that expresses their needs perfectly to God.

As you heard last week:

“God doesn’t leave us alone to try to deal with all the problems and difficulties the next week, or month, or year may bring. The very next verse tells us ***“The Spirit also helps in our weaknesses.”*** Although we confidently wait for the revelation of God’s glory in heaven, we are always battling with many weaknesses of faith. What kinds of things are these? We hate sin and yet we sin again and again. We are not of the world, and yet the lust of the eyes and desires of the flesh in this sinful world contaminate us. Christ has overcome the devil for us, and yet we feel the fiery darts of the devil’s temptations. Though Christ has overcome death, we sometimes tremble at the thought of it. We have fears concerning our church body and congregations even though God has promised that he will never forsake his little flock. Jesus says, ***“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom,”*** Luke 12:32 These are just some of our weaknesses.

“But thanks be to God, the Holy Spirit comes to our aid. In the very next verse we read ***“For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”*** We ourselves pray for God’s help, but those prayers are often weak and sometimes we neglect prayer. When we feel forsaken and our thoughts cannot be expressed in words, we only groan and sigh. We sing in a hymn, “Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire, unuttered or expressed. Prayer is the burden of a sigh,” (The Lutheran Hymnal 454:1). Then the Holy Spirit dwelling in us takes our groans and cries and puts his blessed meaning into them and sends them to the throne of God as an acceptable prayer. These groanings which cannot be spoken come from the heart. Though they are not clothed in words of human speech, God knows what they mean. ***“He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”*** The Holy Spirit pleads for us in a way that fully agrees with the heavenly Father’s will for us.”

What a comfort to know that the God who has created us and sustains us, the God who sent his only-begotten Son to pay the price for our sins, the God who has created and sustained faith in us also helps us pray.

Especially when we are so frustrated we don’t know how to approach God or what to pray for, we are assured ***“the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.”***

This is our comfort and assurance every day of our lives. May we never forget God’s love for us! Amen.

(Revised from a Ministry By Mail sermon for July 31, 2011.)