

The table is set, the turkey is roasted to perfection, the green bean casserole is ready. The sweet potato casserole is lined up next to the mashed potatoes. Everyone is here. For many of us, that will be the scene before us tomorrow.

It is my hope that you will say a table prayer thanking the Lord before you enjoy the homecooked meal. Have your eyes look to heaven before you look around the table at what to fill your plate.

Prayer is a good thing, Paul encourages it in our Epistle lesson for today: **“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people,”** Prayer is important because PRAYER TEACHES US GOD'S WILL.

First, I. Prayer teaches us God's will for conversation. Perhaps what we've been craving more than food last year is conversation. As we gather around the dinner table, we'll be looking forward to catching up with family we haven't seen, perhaps since the pandemic struck.

Just as we look forward to company and fellowship of friends and family, our God is a God who wants to hear from us and talk to us. Prayer is conversation with God. Now, it doesn't mean we pray and then God audibly speaks to us. What it does mean is that we have a God who has spoken to us through His Word, namely, the Bible.

Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh, and He who has heard Him has heard from God. We are reminded from the author of the Hebrews, **“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.”** Prayer is our response to God starting the conversation.

In radio communications, there are two kinds of messages you can send, an actual message, and an acknowledgement. You might message to your commander, “We need more reinforcements!” When your commander replies, “Another battalion is on the way.” You are obligated to reply, “Roger that.”

The Holy Spirit speaking through Paul urges that **“supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people.”** Prayers of thanksgiving are a “Roger that” to all the messages that our Heavenly Father has so graciously and abundantly been giving to us. Prayers of thanksgiving acknowledge that God *has* been in conversation with us and has been blessing us with every good gift.

Luther writes in the Small Catechism: “God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.” Let this be something we consider and dwell upon as we gather with our families for Thanksgiving conversations and let us gladly respond to God's call with a hearty “Roger that” of gratitude.

Second, II. Prayer teaches us God's will for the abundant life. As we gather around a feast tomorrow, we can be thankful that we live in a land of plenty. As we stuff ourselves silly and enjoy the fruit of the harvest tomorrow, we can be thankful that even with supply chain irregularities, it's not a matter of not having food, but only not having our preferred food. It's not that we *can't* get peanut butter, but perhaps the problem is we can't get our favorite brand of peanut butter.

Paul continues in our text that these prayers and thanksgivings are **“for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior,”**

As Luther explained the petition “Give us this Day our Daily Bread” in the Large Catechism, he remarked “Indeed, the greatest need of all is to pray for the civil authorities and the government, for it is chiefly through them that God provides us daily bread and all the comforts of this life. Although we have received from God all good things in abundance, we cannot retain any of them or enjoy them in security and happiness were he not to give us a stable, peaceful government. For where dissension, strife, and war prevail, there daily bread is already taken away or at least reduced. It would therefore be fitting if the coat of arms of every upright prince were emblazoned with a loaf of bread instead of a lion or a wreath of rue, or if a loaf of bread were stamped on coins, in order to remind both princes and subjects that it is through the princes' office that we enjoy protection and peace and that without them we could neither eat nor preserve the precious gift of bread. Therefore, rulers are also worthy of all honor, and we are to render to them what we should and what we are able, as to those through whom we enjoy all our possessions in peace and quietness, because otherwise we could not keep a penny. Moreover, we should pray for them, that through them God may bestow on us still more blessings and good things” [LC III 74-5].

We may not have princes today, but we have mayors, governors, and the like. The Lord commands us to pray for President Joseph Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers and Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, Mayor Mitch Reynolds and Representative Ron Kind. We are to give thanks for them in as far as they promote peace and the abundant life. We are to pray for them where they fall short and where they promote unjust laws. God wants that prayer conversation to continue on this Thanksgiving Day, even in the realm of politics because Our Heavenly Father chooses to work through leaders and governments to give us our daily needs. On this Thanksgiving day, I invite you to give a hearty “Roger that” to acknowledge God's gift of rulers in your life.

Finally, III. Prayer teaches us God's will for family. Paul concludes that God **“desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man**

Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.”

As you gather around the kitchen table and see the cornucopia of food before you, you need to realize it didn't come from nowhere. Mom, grandma, or some other adult likely slaved away for hours to get much of it ready. But if you ask grandma or mom, it isn't a chore, but a joy to see her family gathered around and enjoying the fruit of her labor. She joyfully and willingly does all this for family.

As we look around us at the abundance all around us, we realize it didn't come from nowhere. Paul tells us that Jesus Christ gave himself as a ransom for all. Jesus puts the giving in Thanksgiving. Because He lived the perfect life and suffered to pay for the sins of the whole world, the Father's wrath has been satisfied and we can expect all good things from our God because of Christ alone.

Perhaps as a child, we thought that the Thanksgiving food magically appeared, but now we aren't so naïve. Don't be children in your thinking, you are saved by works. You are saved by obedience. I didn't misspeak, you are saved by works. You are saved by obedience.

But now that I got your attention. You are saved by Christ's works. You are saved by Christ's obedience. Christ is the one cooking in the kitchen for you, preparing a meal much better than just turkey and mashed potatoes. It took His blood, sweat, and tears as He gave His life, yet He did it all for His family.

He rose again on Easter and He now enjoys this family. This family is called the Church, and on this Thanksgiving we realize that God desires all people be saved, and His desire is satisfied in His Church on Earth.

Offer prayers to God for those who are not yet part of the family. Pray for friends and family who do not yet know Jesus. Pray for rulers that they may not only enact laws that enable Christians to thrive, but that the rulers themselves would become part of God's family in Christ Jesus and live out that faith.

Give thanks to God for your faith and the faith of your loved ones. Give a hearty “roger that” to acknowledge and understand that being part of His family is a gift from His Son delivered through His Holy Spirit.

PRAYER TEACHES US GOD'S WILL. Not only is prayer a chance to let our requests be made known to God, but it is a chance for us to open our eyes to give thanks to God for all the requests He has already fulfilled. We are encouraged to thank God in prayer for our rulers, for peace, and for abundance. Above all, God invites us to thank Him for His Son Jesus Christ, without whom none of this would be possible, and who continually invites more to this family of the Church that they too may be all the more abundantly showered in blessings. Amen!