

Today the Advent Candle of Love has been lit in congregations around the world. As I look over this prayer that Jesus taught I see love shining through. It should move us from a selfish worldview to one of the love and concern for the whole world, all of God's creation. As we prepare to celebrate again the coming of the child of God, the Living Christ, our Savior and Redeemer we look one more time at the prayer Jesus taught, "*When you pray...*"

It is not our prayer; it is the world's prayer. Jesus has taught the fundamental things we should pray for not only for us but for the whole world. It is plural prayer. God is the God of all and our prayer focus must be enlarged to encompass the whole world. The first word of the prayer is "our". It reminds us that we are not alone, that we are part of a larger family, the family of God. Yes, we do pray for our needs, our aches and pains but in the process we also remember the needs of others.

We pray not only for our daily bread but for the daily bread of the world. We pray for shelter and food for all the people of the world. We are thankful for what we have, far beyond our daily bread, but acknowledge many live only on daily bread.

We pray that God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And, in praying those words we are committing ourselves to do our part in bringing heaven on earth. It has to be accomplished through us, as imperfect we might be - we are God's chosen carriers of love, forgiveness and grace.

When we pray we acknowledge God's rule in our lives. The spiritual says it all, "This world is not my home, I'm just a passin' through." Yet, we know that even in exile God told the people through Jeremiah to settle in the land, care for the land, take care of the land in which they were. They were to make the world a better place for all beginning with where they were. (Jer 40:9). What benefits you benefits all.

We pray for strength to stay on the right path. We need strength to resist the temptations that wander across our path.

And, as we pray we know that God hears our petitions, our joys and our sorrows. God hears even the whispers of our heart.

It is also a prayer that should challenge us to be better Christians. When we pray this prayer we are calling ourselves to action. We are accepting the task to do God's work on earth as it will be in heaven. We are accepting God's will for the ages. Now, that does not mean that everything is God's will. We have this strange thing called freewill and that allows us to make decisions contrary to the ones God would have us make. Not everything that happens is God's will. Our task is to discern God's will and work for that end here on earth. That x, y or z has happened may be because we have neglected to follow God's wishes and the outcome cannot be dismissed simply as "God's will".

This prayer challenges us to forgive as we have been forgiven. It is never easy to love in the face of hatred. It is not easy to stand alone when everyone else is on the other side. Matthew placed this prayer near the middle of what we call the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, 6, and 7). We need to pay close attention to the challenges that are presented in the Sermon. The hardest one may be in Matthew 5:48, "*Be perfect, therefore, as your Father in heaven is perfect.*" And, this comes in the section concerning loving our enemies.

We end the prayer on a high note of praise - a doxology. Now, this ending is not present in the earliest manuscripts. Luke does not add it. The prayer ends with "*deliver us from evil.*" This doxology does not show up until the first century. It is added in the Didache or the

Teachings of the 12 Fathers. Not only is the doxology added but Christians are told to pray this prayer three times a day (no specific times or hours though).

It is not an unbiblical doxology. As David was praying a prayer of thanksgivings for the gifts that had been given for the building of the Temple (a building he would never see built) - he prays,

*“Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and power, and the glory and the majesty and splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all” (I Chronicles 29:11).*

David acknowledges God’s rule and kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

The doxology draws the prayer to a powerful conclusion. It acknowledges God’s rule and God’s love and our reliance on both. God is our hope, our joy, our peace — God is love. It acknowledges the very foundation of our faith. We are God’s people, God’s representatives here on earth. This prayer is to be lived out through us. Love must be shared - for the power of God’s kingdom is love.

This love will be celebrated again in a few days. We will celebrate Emmanuel, God with. In a town of Bethlehem a child was born. God comes. The sky over Bethlehem is filled with an angelic glory. An angelic choir will sing songs of praise to unclean shepherds. The power of God’s love will be on display for the whole world to see.

In a world that is becoming more and more divided and more and more filled with hate and destruction, we are challenged to be different. We are challenged to bring God’s kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven. We are called to a greater standard, the standard of Love. We need this prayer. We need to understand its full implications and to live our lives to make this a living prayer.

On this Christmas Sunday, let us sing the prayer Jesus taught us...

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NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985  
NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1988