

Exercises in the Creed: What has doctrine to do with prayer?

When Martin Luther planned out a routine of daily prayer for the Christian, he conceived of morning and evening prayers, each including:

- The Invocation and sign of the cross (“In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”), a reminder that we lay down and rise as the baptized-into-Christ Jesus.
- The Apostles’ Creed (which we’ve been studying).
- The Lord’s Prayer (which we’ll look at in more detail next).
- A brief prayer of repentance (in the evening), thanksgiving, and commendation of ourselves, body and soul and all things to God’s hands and his holy angels.

The Apostles’ Creed has a place in our daily prayers, because prayer proceeds from faith. Prayer exercises faith. Prayer is more than simply setting before God all our troubles, and hoping that this time he will do something about them. Prayer also encompasses setting before God all his promises, all the things in which we have put our trust. “In you, O Lord, have I trusted; let me never be confounded!” (*Te Deum Laudamus*) The Psalms are full of examples of recounting the Lord’s deeds as a basis for trusting him (Ps 9:1–10; 22:1–11; 28:1–9; 31:1–24; 118:1–29; etc.). Our prayer is not meant to be simply an accounting of our misery, but of our God’s strength, and if it is also the latter, then it serves faith, and prayer is answered, not necessarily with what we asked for, but with faith.

The lengthy heart of the Apostles’ Creed (if any of it can be called lengthy) is the second article, recounting the saving deeds of our Lord Jesus Christ. We claim to be saved not by the strength of our legs or the power of our warhorses or by our trust in earthly princes (as the Psalms caution us, are not sound places to put our trust) but by what our Lord Jesus has done for us. These things he has done (and does) are not remote from our worries and cares, or don’t have to be. When they are remote from them, faith suffers. When they are near, as by meditation on them when we make our prayers, faith is strengthened.

Suppose my body is weak, and I cannot do for my family what I am used to doing. What does the Creed have to do with this? Well, for all his strength, the Son of God was “conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,” made man. He knows what it is to have flesh, to suffer in it, under human powers like “Pontius Pilate,” to be crucified, dead, and buried,” even. But now, even in that flesh, he is risen “from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty.” This all has everything to do with the suffering of my body. “Lord Jesus, you took on this flesh; you suffered; you chose this weakness, which I am impatient suffering, but by it you conquered, even through death. And you have ascended to the right hand of the Father, having conquered death even in the flesh you share with me, and you live and reign to work all for my good, even knowing full well in your bones, like mine but glorious, what that good is. Have mercy on me. In my weakness be my strength, but in my impatience, give me patience, for in weakness you conquered, and your grace, your suffering and death, your glorious resurrection, it is sufficient for me. Lord, I believe this. Help Thou my unbelief. Amen.” You see how such a prayer, full of who Jesus is and what he has done, serves faith? And what a great answer to prayer that is! (See Luke 11:1–13)

Including the Creed in our daily praying (as its mysteries are included in the Litany, *LSB* p. 288) fills prayer with faith, and the prayer of the righteous (by faith) works much (James 5:16). Lord, by your intercession for us at the Father’s right hand, grant this unto us all.