

The Divine Service: Prayer of the Church [1 Timothy 2:1–4]

Prayer is a great privilege granted to God's people, to know to whom they pray and that their prayers will be heard (John 16:23–28; Matt 6:9–13; 7:7–11; Luke 11:9–13). Following the pattern our Lord has taught us in his own prayer ("Our Father...") and the command he gave through his apostles (1 Tim 2:1–6), the Church, when she gathers together, prays for the needs of the congregation, the Church at large, and the world. So doing, we follow the example of the early Church, which gathered each Lord's day for the "apostles' teaching and the fellowship," for the "breaking of the bread" (the Lord's Supper) and "the prayers" (Acts 2:42). "*The prayers*" may suggest a liturgy, but certainly included petitions much like ours.

The scope of the Church's prayer is very broad. While the prayer of the church may take many forms and incorporate many closely felt concerns, its intent is to gather up all the needs of "the congregation, the Church, and the world," to present them to our heavenly Father, in Jesus name, for him to hear and act on them. Prayers of such broad scope help us to remember that "the same suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world" (1 Pet 5:9) and that our care is not simply for ourselves and our own (for God knows our needs and cares for us) but also for the entire world. Such prayer also helps us keep in perspective what God's will is, whose will, we pray, is to be done. In the midst of our many concerns, for ourselves, our own, and the world, what is God's will? (1 Tim 2:1–6) How is it ultimately done? (See the Small Catechism, Lord's Prayer, Second and Third Petitions, LSB 324). What is, far and away beyond all our other needs, "the one thing needful" (Luke 10:38–42)?

At the same time, we offer up all these concerns to God our Father, believing in the God who will see to all our needs (Matt 6:19–34). Why? Because our Great High Priest has secured for us "an eternal redemption" (Heb 9:11–14), giving us confidence to "enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus" (10:19–25).

It is "meet, right, and salutary" that all our prayers should be offered at this point in the service, when we have been strengthened in the Gospel and await the coming of our Lord Jesus in his flesh and blood, under the bread and wine, to save us. As our Lord prepares to give us the greatest gift, of himself, we elaborate in our prayers that in him, with him, we expect all good things. "Let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:16). And then, we say, "Amen," that is, trusting in Christ's working and doing for us, and his sure intercession before the Father on our behalf, as Luther puts it, "Yes, yes, it shall be so." Thus, having laid all our concerns on Him, we prepare to receive him joyfully as he comes to us in his body and blood.