

Proper 11A (July 20, 2014)

"In Holy Conversation" (Lutheran Service Book #772)

When so much of communication in life is done through single sentences and 'sound bites' it can be a real blessing to have an extended conversation with someone else in an unhurried and unimpeded way. In the 'What does this mean' section responding to the Introduction to the Lord's Prayer ('Our Father who art in heaven') Martin Luther writes: "With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that he is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father." Prayer is a most special conversation, a holy and sanctified speaking with God.

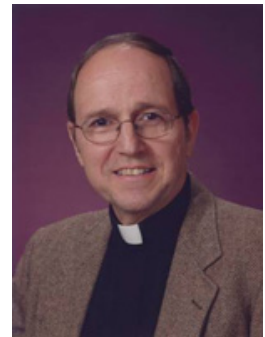
In the first stanza of "In Holy Conversation" we rejoice in God's gracious invitation to come to him in prayer. In the words of the psalmist we hear that invitation fully extended: "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you shall glorify me." (Psalm 50:15) In troubled times, in good times, in all times our heavenly Father is ready to enter into that holy conversation with us. The stanza also reminds us that our speaking to God is assisted fully and fervently. Saint Paul writes: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought..." (Romans 8:28) There may be times when words of prayer are hard to come by. Even then we can be sure that those prayers are in no way defective. The Holy Spirit is with us and for us in our prayer life with encouragement and support.

The second stanza the hymn reflects how we grow in our prayers in the different stages of life. A day begun and ended with prayer is one that is enveloped in the presence of God. Saint Paul wrote to the Christians at Philippi: "But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests

be made know to God.” (Philippians 4:6) God is always ready not only to hear but to respond to our prayers as they come before his throne of grace.

The final stanza of the hymn affirms that God cherishes our prayers and is ready to attend to our concerns even before they are completely expressed. Through the prophet Isaiah the Lord says: “Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear.” (Isaiah 65:24) Prayer is holy and confident conversation. Summing up that central truth, Saint John writes: “And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.” (I John 5:13) So let us pray securely at all times and in all places in silence or by word or by song in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Rev. Gregory J. Wismar (author of the hymn and of this devotion)
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In holy conversation we speak to God in prayer,
And at His invitation our deepest thoughts we share.
We come, His will obeying, as children bringing needs;
And to support our praying, His Spirit intercedes.

These holy conversations begin in child-like ways;
We bring our supplications and words of thanks and praise.
With care our Father listens to every thought expressed,
Then answers our petitions in ways He knows are best.

As holy conversation, in silence or by word,
In every situation through Jesus, we are heard.
So let us pray securely, expressing hopes and fears
With confidence that surely our Father ever hears.

Text: Gregory J. Wismar (b. 1946) Rev. Wismar is a retired Lutheran pastor living in Newtown, CT.
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This devotion was prepared for the website of the Center for Church Music, Concordia University Chicago. It may be downloaded and printed for local use.