



Liturgical Thought

EXPLANATION AND GUIDE TO THE LUTHERAN LITURGY

Why does the Pastor chant or pray the “Our Father” alone? Why do we ring chimes or bells when we pray the “Our Father?”

This prayer is, by tradition, chanted alone by the **pastor/celebrant** while the congregation prays along silently as they are brought to the termination, **“For Thine is the kingdom...”** where the congregation then joins in singing aloud and concludes with the Amen. Even as the Pastor stands in as a **representative of the congregation** during other prayers in the Divine Service such as the Collect, so too, it is natural for him to do so here.

The **“Our Father”** or **“Lord’s Prayer”**, the prayer which Jesus taught His disciples to pray, is the **“table prayer”** of the Church with which we come to the Lord’s Table. Even as it is practiced in many homes where, in honoring and thanking God by praying a prayer of thanks before a meal the family members are led in such prayer by the father or head of the household, so too, it has long been the Church’s custom that the Pastor lead the congregation in this **“table prayer”** during the liturgy of the Sacrament of the Altar.

As **Martin Luther** tells us in his explanation to the opening of the **Lord’s Prayer** *“Our Father, who art in heaven. What does this mean? Answer: God would by these words tenderly invite us to believe that He is our true Father, and that we are His true children, so that we may with all boldness and confidence ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.”* (Luther’s Small Catechism—1943) With this statement, Luther defines the entire prayer **given to us by our Savior, Jesus Christ.**

Given to us by Jesus Himself, this prayer is **the most excellent of all prayers** and though other prayers may be appointed for other seasons, feasts, and celebrations, **the Lord’s Prayer is appropriate for all times and in any situation** or need. Indeed, when other words just will not come, the Lord’s Prayer is the prayer that should first come to the Christian’s lips.

The praying of the **Our Father** in the Divine Service by the Pastor alone **serves to set apart the Divine Worship, or Mass, from the prayer offices such as Matins and Vespers** where the people join the Pastor in praying the Lord’s Prayer. The Pastor’s chanting of the words of the prayer serve to make a **strong connection** of the Our Father to the **Verba, or Words of Institution**, which are also chanted alone by the Pastor.

Any time the **“Our Father”** (Luther would have known this prayer as the **“Vaterunser”**) is prayed within the liturgy, it can be recognized as a model for **Christian Worship** in all its forms.

Little known by many today, the **Lord’s Prayer** may simply be terminated after the words **“deliver us from evil”** by the **“Amen”** where the words **“For thine is the Kingdom....”** etc., **are not prayed at all**. Such is the case for example when praying the **“Suffrages”** during the prayer offices of **Matins or Vespers**. Here, **Luther** again explains: **“What is meant by the word ‘Amen’? Answer: That I should be certain that these petitions are acceptable to our Father in heaven, and are heard by Him; for He Himself has commanded us so to pray, and has promised to hear us. Amen, Amen, that is, Yea, yea, it shall be so.”** (Luther’s Small Catechism—1943)

As to the **ringing of bells** at the petitions of the prayer, a custom still retained in many churches having bells, will find **seven chimes** rung out during the praying of the Our Father—**one for each petition**. This custom arises from the Middle Ages and was retained by Luther. It was used as a **signal to people in their places of work** (field, shop, household, etc.) that the **Lord’s Prayer was being prayed in the worship service and invited God’s people to stop and pray along with those at the service**.

✠✠✠ Soli Deo Gloria ✠✠✠