

“The Third Petition: Christ Shows Us God’s Will”  
Texts: Third Petition of the Lord’s Prayer; Matthew 26:36-75

The Lord’s good and gracious will is revealed in our Passion reading tonight, when a weak and trembling Jesus prayed to His Father and then was betrayed into the hands of sinful men to die. We find Jesus in dark Gethsemane sorrowful and troubled, even to the point of His sacred heart failing right then and there. The weight of the world’s sins pressed down mightily upon Him; He fell upon His face in weakness and trembling, begging, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” The cup Jesus spoke of was the cup of His Father’s wrath against all the sin of the world. God’s wrath is His unmitigated anger, a furious outpouring of condemnation, the fires and torments of hell.

Jesus did not want to drink that cup if there were some other way to atone for the sin of the world. Perfect, sinless, holy Jesus, whose will was perfect, asked for His Father to come up with a different plan. But He didn’t stop there; He continued, “nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” Again, He prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” And a third time, He prayed the same prayer. And then the Father answered His Son’s prayer by giving His Son the strength to accept His good and gracious will. And the Son willingly went into captivity when Judas showed up to betray Him so that God’s will could be done on the cross.

What Jesus would suffer there is told of in our Old Testament reading from Isaiah. The Suffering Servant of the Lord was stricken, smitten, and afflicted by God for our transgressions; crushed for our iniquities; cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgressions of God’s people even though He had done no violence and no lies were upon His lips. Why all this punishment on the Innocent Victim? Isaiah writes, “It was the will of the Lord to crush Him” (Isaiah 53:10). The Father was pleased to crush His own Son and make Him an offering for the guilt of your sin, to spare you the punishment of eternal death in hell. Those of us who are parents cannot even begin to wrap our minds around how the Father could love us enough to pour out His wrath against His own Son. It grieves us to see our children suffer. How could God punish and kill His own Son? We can’t really understand this and we must not try to explain it away; the only way to receive this news is by faith, with awe and thanksgiving that the Lord has done this to save us from our sins.

But the story doesn’t end there. The Father loves the Son and Isaiah’s prophecy did not stop with the death of Jesus, but moves us on to Easter. Isaiah writes that the Suffering Servant “shall see His offspring; He shall prolong His days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.” The Father did not leave His Son in the grave but desired that He be the firstborn of many offspring, the first to spring forth from the tomb and live eternally. The will of the Lord did prosper in the hand of Jesus: on Easter morning, Jesus appeared to the disciples and said, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord” (John 20:19-20). His nail-marked hands speak to us: “Peace be with you.” The scars on His hands reveal the good and gracious will of God, that peace between God and Man had been made by Him who died for our sin and rose again for our justification.

What Jesus did in His death and resurrection fulfilled what He had told His disciples in John 6: “For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:38-40). The good and gracious will of God is that you believe in Jesus and have eternal

life. The devil, the world, and our sinful nature all want us to reject God's name, His kingdom, and His will. We pray "Thy will be done" because we are subject to constant attacks from our enemies and need God's protection against them. By praying, "Thy will be done," we confess that our own will is not strong enough to keep us from falling away from our Lord.

Without our Lord's protection and defense, we couldn't stand for a minute against the temptations of Satan. If you want to see how successful sinful humans are at resisting sin and remaining faithful, just look at every character in tonight's Passion reading except for Jesus. To set the stage, think back to last week's reading. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper and gave His apostles His true body and blood for the forgiveness of their sins. Then, on the Mount of Olives, Jesus predicted that all of the apostles would fall away from Him. Peter insisted that he would never fall away from Jesus, even if everyone else did. Then Jesus told Peter that he would deny Jesus three times. Again, Peter replied sharply, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same.

Tonight's Passion reading shows why it is never a good idea to contradict the words of our Lord. Peter and the other apostles demonstrate that their earlier willingness to stand by Jesus and never deny Him faded when push came to shove. While Jesus was enduring the sorrows in the garden and sweating blood while He prayed, Jesus instructed Peter, James, and John to stay with Him and keep watch. When Jesus returned, they were fast asleep. Then Jesus said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak." But did they obey even with that additional instruction? No, again, they fell asleep, so Jesus just let them sleep while He prayed alone. By this we can see that no one can save us but Jesus Christ alone, all by Himself.

The sleeping disciples highlight a common way that our wills are opposed to the Lord's will: whenever we disobey our Lord's commands. Jesus had told them, "Stay awake and watch," and they went right to sleep. Likewise, even when our spirit desires to obey God's commands, often our weak, sinful flesh drags us down into sinful slumber. We cannot do anything good without our Lord's grace, so we must pray, "Thy will be done," begging that our Lord would move us to love Him and do what He commands.

We also see all the apostles deserting Jesus when He was arrested. They had promised Him that they would not leave His side then abandoned Him. In what ways do we abandon our Lord and leave His presence? When we choose not to hear His Word in church or Bible Class but think we have better things to do, is this not abandoning Jesus when He comes to us with His Word and Sacraments? Or when we do not come to Him in prayer regularly and faithfully, are we not fleeing from His gracious invitation to come to Him with every trouble?

Peter not only abandoned Jesus but denied Him three times. He would not even acknowledge that he knew Jesus. We think we would never do such a thing, but how many times have we stood by silently when someone spoke words contradicting our Lord's Word? How many opportunities to confess the Gospel to others have we passed up for fear of giving offense?

Again, we see our great need to pray, "Thy will be done," so that our will, which would abandon Jesus, deny Him, and fail to confess Him, would be changed to a will of unshakeable confidence in the Lord's mercy. Christians must be prepared to face whatever comes from the Lord's hand and even be willing to suffer and die for our Lord. At Confirmation, the pastor asks, "Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession

and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?” We respond, “I do by the grace of God.” This means that we must be willing to give up what is most precious to us in this life if the Lord desires to take it, but we can only accomplish this awesome task by God’s grace, by His strengthening us through His Word and Sacraments, which deliver to us an eternal kingdom far more valuable than anything the Lord has given us in this life.

When we pray “Thy will be done,” we are saying, “Lord, my will is not important. Your will alone is good. Use my life according to your will.” Those are humbling words to pray, since when we pray we usually have in mind already what we want the Lord to do for us, according to our will. But if the Father’s will was good enough for our Lord Jesus, then it is good enough for us. When we pray “Thy will be done,” we are asking God to accomplish His will for the whole world even if that means that we have to suffer great pain, extreme poverty, and bitter sadness.

But even when we have lost all that is dear to us in this life; even when our situation is scariest or most painful or most uncertain; even in the worst of times, our Baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection tells us that the good and gracious will of God is being done in our life since we are already God’s beloved children, and God only does what is best for His children. As our Lord says in Romans 8, “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). God’s purposes will prevail, for they are intended to save you from the sinful purposes of the devil, the world, and your own flesh. When in doubt, and even when not in doubt, keep your eyes on Jesus. The Passion of Christ tells you that no matter how many times you have failed to do God’s will, you are forgiven of those sins because Jesus did fulfill God’s good and gracious will and makes you God’s own in Baptism. And when no one else in the world seems to care about you, the true body and blood of Jesus given to you at this altar say, “God loves you. He forgives your sins, and invites you to place all your cares and burdens upon Him.” Strengthened by this, you can pray, “Thy will be done” without fear.

“How is God’s will done? God’s will is done when he breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature...and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die. This is His good and gracious will.” Amen.