

“Good Government”

As our nation stops once again to observe a Day of Thanksgiving – like the leper who was healed of his deadly leprosy – we give thanks for the obvious blessings we have received. We give thanks for our family, our health, our homes, the harvest – and so on. But what about the “not so obvious”?

We would all agree that we should give thanks to the Lord for all that He calls “good” – to rejoice and give thanks for that which is “pleasing” in His sight. And yet, many of these good things are “out of sight and out of mind” – and as a result, we fail to return to the Lord and bless Him for the gifts given. [P]

Coming off a contentious election cycle – with approval ratings at an all time low and political advertising at an all time high – God’s Word crashes into our world and tells us that it is “good” and “pleasing” to Him that we should offer “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings” – not just for all people – but especially for “kings and all who are in high positions.”

Dearly beloved, do not close your ears. Do not rebel against this Word of the Lord. Rather, honor God by hearing and believing what He says to you – by praying and giving thanks for those whom He has placed over us as governors.

In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray for “our daily bread” – and as the Small Catechism confesses – our daily bread includes, among other things, “devout and faithful rulers” and “good government.” These are gifts to us from the Lord – good gifts – important for the support and needs of our bodies.

I realize these words of our Lord contradict what our society preaches to us about a separation of church and state. We live in a culture that wants to exclude the God of all Creation from the civil realm, the public square – and yet, God tells His children to pray for them who try to forbid such prayer.

He does this because He is the God of both church and state. He is the Lord of all. In other words, God is at work in both realms. He rules over both – but – the work He does in each one is distinct.

God, through His appointed servants – is at work for your temporal and eternal benefit – for the benefit of both your body and your soul. In both Church and State – God is at work “for you” – and therefore, it is good, right and salutary that we should in all times and places give Him thanks and praise.

“Give us this day our daily bread.” Dr. Luther, in the Large Catechism speaks of this petition in this way. This is a long quote, but I beg you to pay attention to what he says.

[Here we consider the poor bread-basket – the needs of our body and our life on earth. It is a brief and simple word, but very comprehensive. When you pray for “daily bread” you pray for everything that is necessary in order to have and enjoy daily bread and, on the contrary, against everything that interferes with enjoying it. You must therefore enlarge and extend your thought to include not only the oven or the flour bin, but also the broad fields and the whole land which produce and provide for us our daily bread and all kinds of sustenance. For if God did not cause grain to grow and did not bless and preserve it in the field, we could never take a loaf of bread from the oven to set on the table.

To put it briefly, this petition includes everything that belongs to our entire life in this world; only for its sake do we need daily bread. Now, our life requires not only food and clothing and other necessities for our body, but also peace and concord in our daily business and in associations of every description with the people among whom we live and move – in short, everything that pertains to the regulation of our domestic and our civil or political affairs. For where these two relations are interfered with and prevented from functioning properly, there the necessities of life are also interfered with, and life itself cannot be maintained for any length of time. Indeed, the greatest need of all is to pray for our civil authorities and the government, for chiefly through them does God provide us our daily bread and all the comforts of this life. Although we have received

from God all good things in abundance, we cannot retain any of them or enjoy them in security and happiness unless he gives us a stable, peaceful government. For where dissension, strife, and war prevail, there our daily bread is taken away, or at least reduced Again, TO ASK GOD to endow the emperor, kings, and all estates of men, and especially our princes, counselors, magistrates, and officials, with wisdom, strength, and prosperity to govern well and to be victorious over the Turks and all our enemies; to grant their subjects and the people at large to live together in obedience, peace, and concord.]

Here we see how the Large Catechism simply follows God's Word when it urges us to pray "for kings and all who are in high positions."

God has established the governing authorities so that all people might "lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way" as our text says. God is at work to give worldly peace – so the Church can gather to worship, openly proclaim the Gospel to all people, and serve our neighbor with the work He has given each one of us to do.

"This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." God works peace through His civil authorities – and preaches the peace that passes all understanding through His Church – because He desires that all people would be saved.

Do the governing authorities use their God-given power in a way that is not pleasing in the sight of God our Savior? Absolutely. They're sinners, just like us. All the more reason why we should pray that God would give them wisdom to carry out their responsibilities faithfully – that God would repent them, and use them, for the benefit of all who are under their care.

Where our governing authorities have not protected life – all life (especially life in the womb) – where they have corrupted God's good order for gender, and marriage, and family – where they have acted out of greed, or any self-serving way --- we as Christians not only intercede on their behalf before God – but we speak God's Word to them – so that they might know and do God's will.

Dearly beloved, the Lord God not only provides your “daily bread” – but in His Son, Jesus Christ – has given you His Bread from heaven. To nourish, sustain, and protect the faith in Jesus that the Holy Spirit works in you – the Lord showers you with His Word and Sacraments – pouring out His grace upon you – giving you His peace.

In Christ Jesus, you are ransomed from sin and death. In Christ Jesus, you are forgiven, released from the bondage and guilt of sin that binds. In Christ Jesus, you are supplied with daily bread, and with the Bread of life, even eternal life.

Having received such bounty from the Lord – having the promise that He will continue to provide for you in this way – you are free to support the lives of others – to sacrifice yourself to provide daily bread to them – to honor and pray for those who govern – so that all might lead a peaceful and quiet life.

“O, give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, and His mercy endures forever.” Even as you give thanks for your daily bread – come and receive the Bread from heaven – God’s own dear Son, Jesus Christ – in whom you have life and salvation. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.