

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity, September 14, 2008**

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HYMNS: 284, 458:2, 114, 118, 47.

LESSONS: Exodus 20: 1-7, Romans 11: 33-36, Luke 11: 1-10.

TEXT: Luke 11: 2b (KJV) ***“Hallowed be thy name.”***

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In the Old Testament, the Jews, God’s chosen people, regarded God’s name as so holy that they didn’t even speak one of the words used for his name. That name is the name people today pronounce as “Jehovah” or even as “Jahveh” (Yah-vey). The Hebrew Old Testament was originally written without what we would call vowels, just consonants. This was no problem because they were constantly reading it aloud and memorizing it, so they knew how to say the rest of the words that were written down. This word is even today translated in our bibles as LORD – four capital letters – in the Old Testament. Whenever the Old Testament Jews came upon this word in reading scriptures, they would substitute another name for “God”, such as the Hebrew word “Elohim”. (El-o-heem) Even today, you will find documents written by Jews that don’t even spell out the entire word GOD, but print it as “G\*D” – G, asterisk, D. Those kinds of things surely show outward respect for the name of God.

What a contrast to the use of the name of God that we so often hear today! There was a time when on radio and television you would never heard the name of God misused, or used in a profane way, or used casually as a curse, an exclamation, or as swearing. But it seems that many people today think nothing at all of using names like “God”, “Christ”, “Lord” and many other names of God without thinking, or as curses or exclamations. Even confessing Christians struggle hard to avoid misusing God’s name, or taking it in vain.

The first petition we find in the Lord’s Prayer asks our Heavenly Father’s help that by all means his name may be holy.

**HALLOWED BE THY NAME**

1. **God’s name IS holy in itself**
2. **Lord, help us keep thy name holy!**

This petition, like the Address, is also closely related to God’s Second Commandment, which demands **“Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord Thy God in Vain”**, or perhaps more clearly, **“You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God”**. *What does this mean? We should fear and love God that we do not use his name to curse, swear, lie, or deceive, or use witchcraft, but call upon God’s name in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.* Perhaps you memorized it this way: *We should fear and love God that we do not curse, swear, practice superstition, lie, or deceive by His name; but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.*

The commandment is a command from God: This is what you must do! But in the Lord’s Prayer Jesus recognizes mankind’s sinfulness – and our sinfulness – and has us asking that God help us to keep God’s name holy and use it in ways which are pleasing to God.

When we studied the small catechism, we learned that God's name is not only his name and his titles but also everything he has made known of himself. Luther explains this petition in this way: **Hallowed be thy name.** *What does this mean? God's name is certainly holy by itself, but we pray in this petition that we too may keep it holy. How is God's name kept holy? God's name is kept holy when his Word is taught in its truth and purity and we as children of God lead holy lives according to it. Help us to do this dear Father in heaven! But whoever teaches and lives contrary to God's Word dishonors God's name among us. Keep us from doing this, dear Father in heaven!*

We can't make it holy. It is holy in itself. We can make it unholy and drag it into the mud, by cursing, swearing, lying, deceiving and using all forms of witchcraft.

We KEEP it holy by teaching his word in its truth and purity. Not only pastors and teachers in the church, but also parents and older brothers and sisters – every Christian. This means we dare not tell someone something god's Word doesn't say and claim that God says it.

God's name is dishonored – profaned – when anyone teaches contrary to God's Word and when anyone lives contrary to God's Word. The word “profane” originally meant “outside of the temple”, even in pagan societies. Thus profane language and living are all the kinds of things that would not be proper inside the temple, or inside our place of worship! So many live today as if they will never be accountable to God. They do what they please and live the way they want. Should anyone criticize such a sinful action, those who dishonor God's name have many ways of ignoring criticism, and of attacking the one who speaks God's will and word to them, and of generally mocking God.

Notice what Jesus puts first in his petitions to God. If we were asked to compose a prayer for all occasions, we might first ask “for enough to eat and drink and wear, for a comfortable home, for a good income, for enough wealth to provide all the things we want.” Jesus will include something about such things later. But they do not come first. Even the prayer for forgiveness does not come first. Those who called God “our Father” already know about and have God's forgiveness for their sins. They are, after all, children of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus teaches us to make the request that our Father's name might be hallowed – that it might be holy – the top item on our prayer list. To hallow means to set apart as something holy, to treat with holy respect. When we do that to our Father's name, we are doing it to him. We treat our Father's name with proper respect when we think and act as those should think and act who know that God is their Father. Jesus worked hard to get his disciples to show the attitude which ought to be typical of our heavenly Father's children. Trust in him to supply your needs. *“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?”* (Matthew 6:26). Trust him to answer your prayers. *“If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”* (Matthew 7:11). Trust him to protect you. *“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.... So don't be afraid, you are worth more than many sparrows”* (Matthew 10:29, 31). We hallow our Father's name by showing a childlike trust in him, depending upon him to do everything which a heavenly Father could be expected to do.

In his Large Catechism Luther asks ‘But what does it mean to pray that His name may be holy? Is it not holy already? Answer: Yes, it is always holy in its nature, but in our use it is not holy. For God's name was given us when we became Christians and were baptized, so that we are called children of God.’

We ought to be most concerned that God's name – in the broad sense, all that he has made known of himself – have its proper honor, be regarded as holy and as the greatest treasure and sanctuary that we have; and

that as godly children we pray that the name of God, which is already holy in heaven, may also be and remain holy with us upon earth and in all the world.

On Mount Sinai we read that God spoke to Moses in this way: *"Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, 'The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.'"* (Exodus 34:5-7) Notice how much God wants Moses – and his people – to remember about him when they hear God's name!

Jesus himself speaks of God's name in this way: *"I have revealed you - the Greek and the KJV say 'revealed your NAME' to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me."* John 17:6-8. Notice how much Jesus includes in God's name.

But how does God's name and all that he has revealed about himself become holy among us? When both our doctrine and life are godly and Christian. For in this prayer we call God our Father. It is our duty always to live and behave ourselves as godly children, that he may not receive shame, but honor and praise from us.

The name of God is profaned by us either in words or in deed. It is profaned when men preach, teach, and speak in the name of God what is false and misleading. That is, indeed, the greatest profaning and dishonor of the divine name. Furthermore, also when men, by swearing, cursing, conjuring, and use or practice of all sorts of witchcraft and superstition, grossly abuse the holy name as a cloak for their shame. In addition, it is also dishonored by an openly wicked life and works, when those who are called "Christians" and "the people of God" are adulterers, drunkards, misers, envious, and slanderers. Here again the name of God comes to shame and is profaned because of us. For just as it is a shame and disgrace to a natural father to have a bad, perverse child that opposes him in words and deeds, so that on its account he suffers contempt and reproach, so also it brings dishonor upon God if we who are called by His name and have all manner of blessings from Him teach, speak, and live in any other manner except as godly and heavenly children, so that people say of us that we must be not God's, but the devil's children.

So you see that in this petition we pray just for that which God demands in the Second Commandment. For whoever uses the name of God for any sort of wrong profanes and desecrates this holy name. Thus this point is easy and clear when the language is understood, that "to hallow" is the same as to praise, glorify, and honor both in word and deed.

So we see what great need there is of such prayer. For because we see how full the world is of sects and false teachers, who all wear the holy name – the name "Christian" as a cover for their doctrines of devils, we ought by all means to pray without ceasing, and to cry and call upon God against all such as preach and believe falsely and against whatever opposes and persecutes our Gospel and pure doctrine, and would suppress it.

Likewise we must also pray for ourselves, who have the Word of God, but are not thankful for it, nor live as we ought to according to the Word of God. If now you pray for this with your heart, you can be sure that it pleases God; for He will not hear anything more dear to Him than that His honor and praise is exalted above everything else, and His Word is taught in its purity and is regarded as precious and dear.

We are praying that God would help us teach and live his Word in the way which keeps his name holy. *Help us to do this dear Father in heaven! Amen.*

(First preached 8/17/2008) revised 12.5