

*A Holy Prayer -  
Putting First Things First*

*Bible Reading:*

*Psalm 145*

*Catechism Reading:*

*Q/A 122*

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You may know that many organizations and individuals today are developing what are known as Core Value Statements.

That's a listing of the 5 or so key priorities in your organization.

The things that really matter;  
that you won't give up.  
that you'll fight to the end for.  
that are non-negotiable.

Ideally, these Core Value Statements are a mirror of what really happens in the organization. When you watch the people in action - what gets the attention at meetings, what has priority in budgeting, what consumes the most resources, what gets people's attention the quickest - you can soon list their Core Values.

Ideally the formal statement reflects the actions of the person or group.

If not - either change the statement, or have a long and hard look at what's going on and what needs to change in the way of behaviour.

I'm going to give you about 3 minutes.

Please use this time to think about what your last couple of weeks has been like. Be honest with yourself.

Now, based on that, fill in the blanks up on the screen.

What are the top three priorities in your life?

Just three.

Write them on the back of your bulletin.

Or - if your memory is a whole lot better than mine, just hang on to that thought.

1.

2.

3.

[give 3 minutes]

Please pray with me -

*O Lord our God*

*In the quiet of this evening, we pray that you would teach our hearts where and how to seek you,  
where and how to find you.*

*Great God, we are not trying to claw our way to your holy heights,  
for we know that our understanding is in no way equal to the task.*

*But we do want to understand a little of your truth which in our heart we believe and love. And believing, we  
crave to understand more of You.*

*And believing,*

*understanding,*

*to experience you.....*

*..... to truly **know** you in ever-richer ways.*

Through Christ we ask, who taught us to pray,  
 Our Father, who art in heaven.  
 Hallowed be Your name.  
 Your kingdom come.  
 Your will be done,  
     on earth as it is in heaven.  
 Give us this day our daily bread.  
 And forgive us our debts,  
     as we forgive our debtors.  
 And lead us not into temptation.  
 But deliver us from evil.  
 For yours is the Kingdom,  
     and the power  
     and the glory  
     forever!  
 Amen.

[adapted from prayer of Anselm, 1033-1109]

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It just hasn't been the same since the zany 1960's TV rendition of "Batman." The masked apprentice crime fighter *Robin* follows his protege *Batman* blubbing slogans like "*Holy-astray-smoke*," "*Holy moonshine*," "*Holy rat legs*...."

It was a spoof on that habit of ours of assigning divine status to the strangest things with comments like "*holy smoke!*" and "*holy cow!*".

We have taken what ought to be a special word and trivialized it beyond imagination.

Things are to the point where I'm not even sure how many of us could give a coherent explanation of the term **holy**.

We're committed to spending a few Sunday evenings this Spring studying the Lord's Prayer.

Today we pray:

"Our Father.... Hallowed be your name;  
     may your name be made **holy**."

So - When we pray that - what do we mean?

What do we want God's name to be?

How will we know when it has reached that point?

Let's begin with this, then -

what **does** this battered and misused term, **holy**, actually mean?

The root meaning is the ancient Hebrew word - *quadosh*.

That means, "*set apart and set above*."

That which is *holy* is different from everything else;

it important, valuable, rare.

not ordinary, common or *profane*.

So it was that the term *quadosh* soon became identified with the divine.

People began speaking of their gods as "*quadosh*" because they were high in prestige; they were a cut above the things of this earth.

That is, when taken to the ultimate level, what we're talking about when we use the term **holy** to describe the Living Lord God Almighty.

To say "*Jahweh is holy*" is to say that He is set apart and set above everything else.

It is to say that there is nothing that is comparable in greatness or grandeur or importance to Him; that on the ladder of importance he is many, many rungs above the nearest rival.....

..... **many** cuts above!

"*Hallowed be Your name,*" we pray.

Not that God isn't already holy.

Our mere human words, and infinitesimally weak human activity can do absolutely nothing to disrupt or dislodge His essential holiness.

We cannot bring God down.

We cannot make the Lord plain; ordinary.

We cannot sully Jahweh.

He **IS** holy!

Isaiah 6 peels back the cover of heaven, and gives us a glimpse -

*1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple.*

*2 Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew.*

*3 And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."*

*4 The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.*

*5 And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (v.1-5)*

Or,

to use the language from the heavenly worshipers in *Revelation* -

*to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power for ever and ever!*

Indeed, God **IS** holy!

When we pray, "*Hallowed be Your name*" we're praying not for a change in the actual stature of God, but in how His stature, perfection, beauty and power **is recognized**.

We're praying that God be **treated** as Holy;

**treated** with the respect He deserves.

As Martin Luther put it, "His name is always holy... but our use of it is not."

This opening petition of the Lord's Prayer is the first of a series of petitions that is connected to our relationships with God

- hallowed be Your name
- Your kingdom come
- Your will be done

The second part of the prayer deals with our human needs & conditions.

Can you think of one of the other major building blocks of the Heidelberg Catechism that reflects this same two-part structure?

Part A - dealing with deity

Part B - dealing with humanity

Come to think of it - do you know the four major components of the Catechism, the four major themes of the Christian faith which serve as anchor points for all the teaching?

1. Apostles' Creed
2. Sacraments
3. 10 Commandments
4. Lord's Prayer

And it is the 10 Commandments with the same structure.

Table One of the Law deals with our relationship to God.

Table Two of the Law deals with our relationship to other people.

When I pray the petition - "*Hallowed be Your name*"

it is a prayer for the first table of the Law to become visible and active, in pure and good ways, in my life.

*Lord, help me not to place anything as a god before you.*

*Lord, prevent me from bowing down before anything as a false representation of You.*

*Lord, keep me from misusing your great Name.*

*Lord, direct my living so that I may keep the rhythm of work, rest and worship that You call for.*

Think of it this way -

The **first** item in the Lord's Prayer is the item concerned with the reputation and honour of God.

Which makes me ask -

What's the **first**, the **most important** item in my life?

Go back to that assignment I gave at the top -

The three core values of your life.... is the first item of the Lord's Prayer echoed somewhere in there?

First things first.....

What **does** come first..... really?

Remember what we recited at the beginning of the service - Psalm 145?

Let's read the entire Psalm of David together.

Psalm 145:1 I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever.

2 Every day I will bless you, and praise your name forever and ever.

3 Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable.

4 One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.

5 On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.

6 The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed, and I will declare your greatness.

7 They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness, and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

8 The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

9 The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

10 All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your faithful shall bless you.

11 They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power,

12 to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The LORD is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds.

14 The LORD upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.

15 The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.

16 You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.

17 The LORD is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings.

- 18 The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.  
 19 He fulfills the desire of all who fear him; he also hears their cry, and saves them.  
 20 The LORD watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.  
 21 My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever.

Hear the echo of v.1:

*I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever.*

Really?

Or is just that nice liturgical language which will go back up on the shelf till next Sunday?

That's the question I have to ask of myself.

And which I'd invite you to ask of yourself.

*Our Father in heaven - hallowed be your name.*

A petition of four small words.

And yet one of the most powerful and difficult petitions that could spill off our lips.

Calvin says that we could paraphrase the prayer this way:

*Lord, let anything in my life that obscures or impairs peoples' vision of your glory; anything in my actions or speech that distracts people from you, or is an insult to your reputation let any such thing cease.*

Wow! What a beautiful way to put it. What a rich prayer!

Want a great way to start your day? Try praying this each morning:

*Lord, You are the best part of my existence.*

*You are the most important element in my day.*

*You are more valuable to me than anything else ever could be.*

*Let my actions and speech show that.*

Andrew Kuyvenhoven said -

*The worst thing my life can be is an obstacle between anybody and God. And the **best** thing I can be is a stepping stone by which someone reaches the Father's house.....*

*What we are asking the Holy Spirit to do to us when we pray "Hallowed be Your name" is to reshape our lives so that they act like a stunning arrangement of flowers which so impresses people who see it that they immediately inquire about who did the arranging and where they could get an arrangement like that.*

One of the most revolting shows on TV these days is *The Osbornes*.

Dark and disgusting - period.

In one of the ad's for the show, Ozzy says, "*That's just who we are.*"

I wonder if someone followed **me** around with a camera for a few days what they would find. What am I **just** like?

O Lord!

Help!

For I crave you to be hallowed through it.....

.....not insulted or embarrassed!

Lord, let my actions and words put a shine on your reputation.

Not throw dirt on it!

Last week we said that the most important event in all of Creation history is the Easter event - the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now that it's come and gone - are there any resurrection reverberations still present in our lives?

One songwriter of a few years back put it this way -

*You're the only Jesus some will ever see.  
You're the only words of life some will ever hear.  
So let them see in you  
the One in whom  
is all they'll ever need.  
You're the only Jesus some will ever see.  
So let it shine.  
Let it glow!  
Let them see Him in you.  
You've got to let them know!*

A famous Latin phrase in our tradition is *Ora et Labora*.

Pray and work.  
The two go hand in hand.  
We simply **cannot** pray something and not see it impact activity.  
I mean - can a prayer be sincere if action doesn't follow from it - somehow?

Here, then, is the challenge.

Because what we're praying for - the honour of God to be seen in us - is completely out of reach.

**Except** for the holy grace that is ours at the cross.

**And** the power that radiates from the Holy Spirit.

Only through Jesus dare we pray for God's honour.

Only with conscious dependence on His Spirit can we begin to act on it in honest and visible ways.

**With** them, we not only **dare** to pray.

We can pray this prayer **with confidence**.

And head out each day **with boldness** to live it.

We can head out from here, boldly.... to quote the Catechism, in Q.115:

*praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit  
....never stop striving  
to be renewed more and more after God's image,  
until after this life we reach our goal - perfection.*

We head out from here, praying that the fingerprints of God would be all over our lives.

His hand firmly on us.

His influence visible.

Will you join me in that prayer? Saying it? And living it?

Please join me by reciting together Q/A 122 of the Catechism:

Q: *What does the first request mean?*

A: *Hallowed be Your name* means:

Help us to really know you,  
to bless, worship, and praise you  
for all your works  
and for all that shines forth from them:  
Your almighty power, wisdom, kindness,  
justice, mercy and truth.

And it means,

Help us to direct all our living -  
what we think, say, and do -  
so that your name will never be blasphemed  
because of us  
but always honored and praised.

**CLOSING PRAYER -**

Lord, when we took the name "*Christian*" we took your name and added it to ours.  
And Father, sometimes we have profaned it rather than made it holy,  
- through abuse, or through sheer neglect.  
Forgive us, Father, for the damage we've done your name.  
Forgive us for the shame we've brought to all who are called "Christian."  
And as we leave here, help us to make our lives not a curse, but a beautiful prayer, so when others join  
in with us they will give honour and praise where once they gave profanities.  
Our Father who art in heaven.....  
....hallowed be Your name.  
Amen.