

O dearest Savior, who in Gethsemane did accept the bitter cup in submission to the Father's will: Look mercifully upon our weak and wayward lives, and arm us with such strength and courage that we may tread without fear the appointed path of duty, and evermore follow the pattern of Your costly obedience; also graciously grant that we, always continuing in prayer, may gain abundantly the fruit thereof, and be partakers of Your victory, for Your honor and glory, who now live and reign with the Father the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen. (Parish Prayers, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 69 *adapted*)

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and He said to His disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." And taking with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then He said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with Me." And going a little farther He fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And He 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." Again, for the second time, He went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, Your will be done." And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, He went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. Then He came to the disciples and said to them, "Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, My betrayer is at hand."

In Christ Jesus, despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; one from whom men hide their faces, and was despised, all for our eternal happiness, dear fellow redeemed:

We are told that Jesus "began to be sorrowful and troubled", but not like our sorrow today. Our sorrow today concerns the sins of one person, Jesus' sorrow equaled the sorrow as the sinner of sinners, since He was receiving the Father's full eternal wrath for all sins of all sinners of all time. Do not misunderstand, our Lord was not filled with self-pity here, but the true godly sorrow for all our sin.

Jesus was troubled because He was now facing the full weight of the Father's condemnation for you, me and all sinners. It was the Father's will from eternity that His Son would bear this weight for us. But so much did Jesus trust the gracious will of His Father He addressed Him three times with those tender words: "My Father ..."

Think back to the times you so angered your earthly father, knowing you were going to receive the just punishment for your

wrong doing. Did you go to him trusting in his love and dare ask him for a favor? - very likely not. You probably instead approached your mother to intercede for you. Our Lord Jesus demonstrated His absolute righteous trust in the gracious will of God the Father, even though He anticipated soon having to cry out in His eternal abandonment for us: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Jesus knew the Father's truly gracious will for Him to suffer and die, as He was now facing. So much so did Jesus have this confidence that after drinking the cup of eternal wrath upon the cross and declaring it was finished, He once again prayed to the Father and said: "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit."

In no way did Jesus' will conflict with that of the Father, but, knowing the severity of the judgment He would now need to endure, He asked for another way to accomplish the same thing. But He only desired this, if it was still in accord with the Father's will. As you know it was not the Father's will to accomplish this in any other way, so Jesus went on to suffer the full extent of your punishment willingly; drinking the cup of the Father's wrath toward our sin to the last bitter drop with the result that He thirsted the thirst of hell.

Now today you are especially focused upon your sin and all of its deserving, namely being eternally cut off from the Father's loving presence, so that His countenance is not lifted up upon you, but turned away from you, worse yet, turned against you. That smudge of ash on your foreheads is an acknowledgment of that deserving. But must we not all admit that for most of the days of the year we are like the sleeping disciples, not watching and praying, but content with ourselves, even self indulgent? Sadly, we must all answer "yes" to that question.

But our Lord Jesus taught us to address His Father with the same confidence He showed as the One condemned to die in our place, die everlastingly. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, He began by saying: "Our Father, who art in heaven ..."

Through the One who came from the bosom of the Father to reveal Him to us taught us that *"God hereby tenderly invites you to believe that He is your true Father, and that you are His true child, so that you may ask Him with all boldness and confidence, as a child asks his/her dear father."* And by instructing us to approach the throne of the eternal Father with such boldness, Jesus in a sense is telling us the same thing He told His disciples after He awakened them for the third time: "Sleep and take your rest later on."

Luther demonstrated this same reason for confidence in our

prayers to the Father by his instruction concerning our bedtime ritual of worship when he said: *"kneeling or standing, you shall say the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer. Then you may say this evening prayer. And then lie down in peace, and sleep."* That however is not the sleep of weak indifference, but the sleep of boldness, confidence and certainty that you have a God who loves you and has forgiven you.

With such confidence my fellow repentant sinners watch and pray, and yes, even sleep in peace, even as you finally get to fall peacefully asleep into the sleep of death. As you heard: *From dust you are and to dust you shall return, but also for Jesus' sake from dust you shall rise again!*

*"Preserve us, O Lord, while waking, and guard us while sleeping, that awake we may watch with Christ, and asleep we may rest in peace."* Amen.