

“*Thy will be done.*” This is perhaps the most difficult petition in the Lord’s Prayer. And it can be very puzzling to us. Our Lord prayed a lot and there is quite a difference between this petition and His high-priestly prayer. In that prayer, in John 17, Jesus asks the Father to give Him the glory He had before the world began. Then He prays for His disciples, including that they be protected from the Evil One. He concludes by asking that all believers see His glory from before creation.

Then in the garden, Jesus prays that the cup of suffering be taken from him. But He adds, **“*Yet not what I will, but what You will.*”** (Mark 14:36)

Jesus’ glory would come – through the cross. While we can’t comprehend the intensity of Jesus’ agony, we can relate to it. We also dread some things in our future – unpaid bills, a loved one’s death, illness, disability, operations, loss of employment, long standing family quarrels – and the list could go on.

Or – our future fears could be those crosses we carry because we are followers of Jesus. Our Lord said, **“*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*”** (Matt. 16:24)

Not every burden in life is necessarily a cross. Only those burden which we willingly bear because of our identification with Christ are called crosses. A broken leg, a house destroyed by fire, or a car accident - are not crosses in Jesus’ use of the word. However, a secretary who rejects the advances of her boss and therefore is demoted or fired – she bears a cross. A salesman who will not cheat and subsequently is assigned a poorer or smaller territory because impressive profits require dishonesty – this man carries a cross.

Or, the cross may be some impediment to who we are and what we do. We believe we could be more effective if the handicap were removed. Think of St. Paul who asked the Lord three times to take away a **“*thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan*”**

to torment me.” That should be God’s will right? But the Lord’s answer was, **“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”** (2 Cor. 12:7-9)

Nevertheless, even these crosses are light when compared to the cross upon which Jesus suffered and died. He paid the penalty for our sins, suffering hell in our place, that we might have forgiveness, peace and eternal life.

We cannot fathom what Jesus endured in the Garden of Gethsemane as He knelt on the ground. We are told that sweat from His agony mingled with drops of blood, showing that HE was true man. (Luke 22:44). Medically, we are told it is possible for small blood vessels to break permitting blood to mix with sweat. And this happened to Jesus to the point that it fell to the ground in drops.

Jesus struggled alone. The three disciples with Him were no help and soon each of the twelve would forsake Him fulfilling the prophecy in Isaiah 63, **“I have trodden the winepress alone.”**

So – was Jesus prayer ignored? **“Let this cup pass from me.”** Was it ignored? His prayer ever ignored? Certainly not! The cup stays was the Father’s answer – His will prevails. But we are told **“an angel from heaven appeared to Him to strengthen Him.”** (Luke 22:43) And with renewed energy Jesus doesn’t wait for Judas and the crowd to arrive, but takes the initiative as He rouses the disciples saying, **“Rise! Let us go! Here comes My betrayer!”** (Mark 14:42)

Jesus prayed and knew this was God’s will. But it begs the question – Does God will everything that happens? It is not possible to comprehend God. As someone observed, **“If I could understand God, I would BE God.”**

Paul said it well, **“Oh, the depth of the riches of wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments and His paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor?”** (Rom. 11:33-

34) And toward the end of his miseries Job admits, ***“Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.” (Job 42:3)***

Even so, by the grace of God and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we hold firmly to God’s Word, we can arrive at certain conclusions. God has a single will, but because of our limited comprehension, He lets us see Him with both a revealed will and a hidden will. For instance, in His word God reveals that He wants sinners to be saved. Jesus said, ***“My Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life.” (John 6:40)***

It’s also God’s revealed will that believers lead godly lives. Paul writes to the Thessalonian Christians, ***“It is God’s wil that you should be sanctified.” (1 Thess 4:3)*** But there are certain spiritual truths that God keeps hidden; the Bible does not furnish us with answers to every question we ask. ***“No one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.” (1 Cor. 2:11)***

God’s Word also demonstrates an irresistible and a resistible will of God. For example, no one has a choice about being present on judgment day, “For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat.” (Rom. 14:10) Jesus stresses this in the parables of the wheat and weeds, the good and bad fish, and the sheep and the goats.

However, God’s will can be resisted regarding salvation. We know God WANTS all persons ***“to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” (1 Tim. 2:4)*** ***2 Peter 3:9*** also tells us, ***“He (God) is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”*** Yet there are many that reject the Word of God and ***“resist the Holy Spirit”*** as Stephen said the Jewish leaders did (Acts 7:51)

God also reveals that what He permits may differ from what He ordains. For example, God doesn’t want us to sin – but He allows it to happen. Yet there are certain things He ordains. ***Acts 17:31*** tells us, ***“He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man He has appointed.”***

While it's not easy to understand God does permit opposition to His will. In the Small Catechism, Luther identifies three sources that oppose God's good and gracious will: the devil – the world – and our sinful nature. And we see them at work in the account of Jesus' Passion. It begins by noting that the devil ***“entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus.”*** (Luke 22:3-4) This wasn't the usual demonic possession that our Lord encountered throughout His ministry. Here - the mind, heart, and will of the betrayer were taken over by the Evil One.

Peter's vehement denial of Jesus, swearing ***“I don't know the man”*** (Matt. 26:72,74) is a prime example of the world opposing God's will. So also are Pontius Pilate, with his contempt for the truth – the mob that cried, ***“Crucify Him!”*** (Matt. 27:22); and those who insulted and mocked Jesus saying, ***“You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself!”*** (Matt. 27:40)

Humanity's sinful nature, in opposition to God's will, surfaces when the Twelve abandon Jesus in Gethsemane shortly after Jesus admonishes Peter saying, ***“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*** (Matt. 26:41)

That same Jesus gives us that same admonition but also shares words of comfort naming us heirs to an eternal future in a home where the will of God is done WITHOUT opposition. Amid all the uncertainty and questions in your life and in this world - hear these willful words of Jesus in ***John 14:1-3, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you...and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me.”*** Amen.