

Daily Provision – Daily Devotion

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Dr. John W. Kleinig

A little noted feature of Luther's *Large Catechism* is its repeated emphasis on the daily life of the Christian as a process of daily reception from God. His daily provision for the life of the body and of the soul results in the daily exercise of faith that receives what God grants for our livelihood and enjoyment.

This vision of our continuing dependence on God's life-sustaining goodness has been lost in our society with its delusion of person autonomy and the illusion that we actually possess everything - and even our own selves - as our personal property. God's word teaches that this is not so at all. Just as we receive ourselves and our life from God our Creator at each moment of our existence, so we gain everything else daily from him for our use and enjoyment. Yet despite that even Christians all too often act as if they were their own gods rather than richly blessed beneficiaries of God's daily physical and spiritual bounty. They violate the First Commandment by refusing to put their trust in God and his gifts rather than themselves and their own possessions.

That is what Luther counters quite practically in *the Large Catechism* with its stress on the daily life of faith. He champions the use of the catechism to teach us about God's ongoing provision for them, so that we receive everything daily from him and are inspired to devote ourselves daily to him. Each of its five main parts plays a part in our daily instruction by God (LC Pref 1.16) and reception from him through his word (LC Pref 1.13, 19). Thus Luther advocates the practice of daily meditation on the Ten Commandments as instruction on what God requires from us and desires for us in our lives as well as on the Apostles Creed as our confession of faith in what he has given and is still giving for us; he also promotes our daily exercise of receptive faith with the use of the Lord's Prayer, our remembrance of baptism, and our nourishment with the Lord's Supper. In all this he presupposes that our daily exercise of faith depends on God's daily care for us both as creatures in the world and as saints in the church.

The daily exercise of receptive faith in God depends his daily provision for our bodily life in the world (LC 1.173). There he provides daily bread for us and all people on earth. Indeed, 'it is he who gives us 'body, life, food, food, drink, nourishment, health, protection, peace,' and so on (LC 1:24). Through natural world and good government he gives us 'our daily bread and all the comforts of this life' (LC 3.72-74). All that we are and all that we have comes daily from him; he cares for us in all our needs and faithfully provides for our daily existence (LC 3.82; cf. 2:13-17). He also protects us from all that is harmful and dangerous and evil (LC 2.17; cf. SC 2.2). So all that we have is 'daily given and sustained by God' (LC 2.19).

The daily reception of these temporal blessings does not depend on our faith in God. They are lavished on all people whether they have faith in him or not (LC 3.82-83; cf. SC 3.13). But they are received differently by those who trust in him; they receive them consciously, deliberately, and obediently. They receive them consciously as gifts from him as they meditate daily on what God provides according to the first article of the Creed, so that they may daily ‘sense and see in them his fatherly heart and boundless love’ for them as their Creator and heavenly Father (LC 2.23; cf. SC 2.2). Their faith in his provision for them inspires them to pray daily for what they need by their use of the Lord’s Prayer (LC 3.82-83), receive all good things daily from him with thanksgiving for them as gifts from him and praise for him as their giver (LC 2.19-21, 23; cf. SC 2.2), and commend themselves daily to him (LC 2.73). Their faith in his goodness constrains them to devote themselves to him and use his gifts obediently in his service as required in the Ten Commandments (LC 2.19, 22; cf. SC 2.2).

Above all else, the daily exercise of receptive faith depends on the work of the Holy Spirit that God grants to his people (LC 3.51-54; cf. SC 3:8). While God’s work of creation and redemption has already been accomplished, the Holy Spirit continues to work unceasingly in the church and the life of the believer through the word until the end of the world (LC 2.61-62). Through the word he daily draws us to himself in order to impart, increase, and strengthen faith in Christ (LC 2.62). What Christ has won for us the Spirit delivers to us in the church and the Christian home. By Christ’s presence with us and our daily prayerful meditation on God’s word in the catechism, the Holy Spirit is not only present with us, but also ‘bestows ever new light and devotion, so that it tastes better and better and is digested, as Christ also promises in Matthew 18[:20]: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them”’ (LC Pref 1.9). The daily provision of the Holy Spirit inspires the practice of daily devotion. Like the sun the Spirit daily enlightens our minds and warms our hearts; like a good cook the Spirit provides us with delectable daily spiritual nourishment, food that tastes better and better the more we digest it.

In and by ourselves we possess nothing. Our union with Christ who died to reclaim us does not make us permanent owners of spiritual gifts but ongoing recipients of them. And daily so! They are ours only as we continue to receive them by the exercise of faith in God’s word in meditation and prayer. That’s why God has instructs us in Deut 6:7-8 to meditate daily on his word which, says Luther, is summed up in the catechism (LC Pref 1.14; cf 1.331-32). Such people are truly blessed for they receive more and more from God (Ps 1:2; LC Pref 1.10). Since God teaches about himself, his will for us, and his gifts to us daily in the catechism, we need to meditate on it daily and use it daily to ‘receive strength, comfort, and help’ from him (LC Pref 1.11, 16, 19). Since we sin daily (LC 2.22; 3.86, 89, 93; cf. SC 3.16), we need to receive daily forgiveness in order to live before God with a good conscience (LC 2:58, 59; 3:92, 93). Since we are tempted daily by the devil for as long as we live (LC 3.102), we need to receive daily spiritual protection from God’s word as the only true holy incense and holy water that routs the devil and puts him to flight (LC Pref 1.10; 2.17). Since we are daily under the dominion of the devil (LC 3.100) and are under constant attack by him (LC 3:109), we need to receive daily

deliverance (LC Pref 1.12-15; cf. 1.102). Since we cannot sustain our spiritual life with our own resources, we need to receive daily nourishment from God's word (LC Pref 1.13) and Christ's Holy Supper (LC 5.24). Since we remain unclean and unholy in ourselves for as long as we live, we need to receive daily sanctification and increase in holiness by hearing God's holy word day by day on our journey here on earth (LC 2.52-53, 57, 59).

Our daily Christian life stems from our baptism which is not just a past event but continues in its operation (LC 4.77-82). Our whole life is, in fact, 'nothing else than daily baptism, begun once and continuing ever after' (LC 4.65). By our baptismal union with the risen Lord Jesus we participate in his death and resurrection each day of our lives and for our whole life on earth (LC 4.64-86). We therefore relive our baptism daily by dying and rising with Jesus; daily the Holy Spirit puts to death the old self, the old Adam, with its all its characteristic vices and raises up a new self that belongs to Christ and becomes more and more like him (cf. SC 4.12). By the practice of daily repentance we suppress the old corrupt self and enter the new life that Christ provides for us in the church, the ship that brings us from earth to heaven (LC 4.74-82). We put on Christ as our daily set of clothes that we wear at all time; every day we return to Christ as our mercy seat even though we sin and receive forgiveness from him (LC 4.84, 86).

The catechism not only teaches what God provides for us daily through his word; it also grants his 'strength, comfort and help' to us as we meditate on it and use it (LC Pref 1.11). As God's word it is inexhaustible in its usefulness, power, and fruit (LC Pref 1.12-13). The longer we work with it, the more we will find to learn; the more we receive from it, the more we will relish it as we become increasingly hungry and thirsty for what it has to offer (LC Pref 1.20). As God's living, effective word it is 'always awakens new understanding, pleasure and devotion, and it constantly creates clean hearts and minds' (LC 1.101). Its daily provision makes for daily devotion to God and his word.