

# Hymn Text Background History

## 773 – Hear us, Father, when we pray

This hymn's author, Chad Bird (b.1970), writes the following about the context for this hymn:

I wrote the hymn while serving St. Paul, Wellston, Oklahoma, during the week of Rogate, 2001. While preparing the sermon, as well as choosing the hymn for that Sunday, I was struck by the need to connect a Christian's prayer to the sacrifice of Christ, as well as to the whole work of Trinity. As those thoughts fermented, several key themes and images of the hymn began to merge; that our prayers that our prayers are acceptable to the Father through the bloody work of the Son; that our prayers are precisely the prayers of the baptized, i.e., those who call "God" but "Father"; and that our prayers are like incense that ascends to the Father's throne,<sup>1</sup>

Bird's style is rich in biblical imagery, weaving texts from Romans, 1 John, the Psalms, and Revelation together in the form of a prayer that God would give us what we have inherited as His baptized children. The hymn would be appropriate for Rogate, the Sixth Sunday of Easter, and for other services that focus on prayer, the Means of Grace, or the work of the Holy Trinity in giving us all things in Christ.

## Text Commentary

Stanza 1 begins with echoes of the Lord's Prayer

*(Matthew 6:9)*

*Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.*

And continues, in trinitarian language, to teach how the Holy Spirit gives us everything we have inherited as children of the heavenly Father by the virtue of Baptism into Christ Jesus

*Romans 8:1-7*

*<sup>1</sup>There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup>For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup>For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By*

*NOTE: The text commentary and Historical Summary is found in the Lutheran Service Book Companion to the Hymns Volume 1. Available online at Concordia Publishing House. Great resource to have on hand.*

*sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup>in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. <sup>5</sup>For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup>For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.*

*Matthew 25:34*

*Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*

*Galatians 3:26-27*

*<sup>26</sup>for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. <sup>27</sup>For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

*Hebrews 6:12*

*so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

Notice the use of “inherit” and “heirs,” words central to understanding how we receive the promise of Abraham by faith in Christ.

Stanza 2 is a poetic interpretation of

*Romans 8:26-27*

*<sup>26</sup>Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. <sup>27</sup>And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*

Bird emphasized that when we do not know what to pray, we not only want the Holy Spirit to intercede for us but that He would also “groan within us.” The Holy Spirit dwells in us through Baptism, and so when we suffer and cry out. He helps us in our weakness so that “by sigh, too deep for words,” our prayers do not go unheard.

Stanza 3 uses truths from

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### ***Hebrews 4:14-16***

***<sup>14</sup>Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup>For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup>Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.***

### ***1 John 2:1***

***My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.***

To point to Jesus and His atoning sacrifice as the basis of prayer: only through faith in Christ are we able to approach the throne of grace. As our High Priest, He continually appears before Father and prays for us, assuring us that our prayers; through His mediation, are pleasing and acceptable to God. And so we can pray with all boldness and confidence in the knowledge that our heavenly Father hears us, as the Small Catechism states.<sup>2</sup>

Stanza 4 asks the Holy Spirit to attend to our prayers and lift them up to heaven.

### ***Psalms 141:2***

***Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!***

### ***Revelation 5:8***

***And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.***

depict the prayers of God's people as incense raising up to heaven. The connection between the temple incense offering and the final sacrifice of Christ perfecting and rendering our prayers well pleasing to God is clear and beautiful.

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