

THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
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Praying the Litany during Lent - A brief history and explanation

Lent is a penitential time of preparation and during Lent the Church makes a couple of adjustments in the liturgy of the Divine Service as she acknowledges the unique character of this season. For example, we replace the “Hallelujah” with “Christ humbled Himself...” Some congregations do not have any responses before or after the Gospel, but instead sing hymn 48 v.1 after the Gospel is read. We also drop the “Hallelujah” at the *Thanksgiving* after Holy Communion.

In our hymn books on page 80 in the *LH with Supplement*, and page 90 in the black book, we find the Litany - a prayer form deeply rooted in the piety and history of the Church. Some churches see Lent as an ideal time to use the Litany. The Litany is an ancient prayer form that dates back to at least the fourth century A.D. The name Litany is derived from a Greek word that means “prayer” or “entreaty.” Martin Luther highly valued the Litany. He regarded the Litany as, “next to the holy Lord’s Prayer the very best that has come to earth.” It is because of the care and attention Luther directed towards the Litany that the Lutheran church continues to use it to this day.

The Litany is a responsive prayer form, but it can also be used by the individual Christian as he/she prays both halves. The Litany has held a place in the Church for nearly two thousand years because of the way it combines a mood of adoration with a penitential tone. It grounds its requests for mercy in the saving work of Jesus Christ, and while including the needs of the individual, it focuses on prayer for the needs of others. Liturgical scholar Luther Reed summarised the character of the litany well when he wrote, “The Litany is a responsive prayer of the church, penitential in character but unselfish in its intercessions for all human need and might in the grasp of the grounds for divine compassion.”

The Litany as it has come to us began as a prayer form used in processions outside of the church building. The chanted responses gave the people a way to participate and became very popular during the medieval period. During this time the litany began to include invocations of the saints and eventually the

processions of which it was part were thought to be beneficial in gaining indulgences (hundreds of days off of time in purgatory).

At the time of the Reformation, Reformed churches and those of the radical Reformation rejected the Litany altogether, just as they did with so much of the catholic (universal) heritage of the Church. However, Martin Luther took a very different approach. He recognised the great spiritual benefit of the Litany. He removed the objectionable parts such as the invocation of the saints, and intercessions for the pope and the dead. He altered the order slightly and added some material that was more concise and specific than the medieval Litany. His work was so successful that Thomas Cranmer relied heavily on Luther's work in producing a *Litany for the Anglican Book of Common Prayer in England*.

The Litany has a repeated and insistent feeling that recalls the persistent friend in Jesus' parable about prayer (Luke 11:5-10). It establishes a mood of adoration as it begins with the Kyrie ("Lord have mercy") addressed to the triune God. The next section is comprised of deprecations (from the Latin *deprecari*, meaning to avert by prayer) which begin with the word "from..." and ask God to deliver us from various threats and dangers.

Next come the obsecrations (from the Latin *obsecrare*, meaning to ask on religious grounds) in which we pray "Help us good Lord." This petition sets forth the reason we can confidently ask for Christ's help. Introduced with the words, "By the mystery of..." the Litany narrates our Lord's saving work from incarnation through ascension and sending of the Holy Spirit. Because He was done this, we know that He will answer our prayer for help.

This is followed by the supplications, which are specific prayers we ask on behalf of ourselves. The striking thing about them (especially when compared with the intercessions that follow) is how brief they are. We pray, "In all time of trouble; in all time of prosperity; in the hour of death; and in the day of judgment: Help us good Lord." We ask for God's help in good times and bad times; in the hour of our death and on the Last Day.

The intercessions are the last section and they are the largest. In our prayers, there is a tendency for us to focus on our own concerns. We pray for our own needs, and if we pray for others these tend to be people who are close to us. However, St. Paul wrote, "*First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers,*

intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:1-4). The intercessions include prayers for the Church and for people in many different situations. This is a helpful corrective and reminder for our prayer life in general. Perhaps the final intercession, “To forgive our enemies, persecutors, and slanderers,” is the one we need the most. Our Lord said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:43-44). We often forget to do this, and the Litany holds up this need before us.

Having begun with the Kyrie (“Lord have mercy”), the Litany also ends with the Kyrie. This is usually followed by the Lord’s Prayer and then a Collect. Taking home the bulletin from Sunday and using the Collect of the Day printed there, use the Litany every day through the season of Lent!



A couple weeks’ ago it was reported that Kobe Bryant, a famous basketball player from the USA, his daughter, and seven others were killed in a helicopter crash. While his name may not be so popular in Australia, we can take much from the following article, written by Pastor Philip Hale, and published in *Christian News*.

“Kobe Bryant, the Sinner, Gets What He Deserves”

You probably have not seen this headline in recent days. You likely have heard only positive things, even that he went to church. But leaving aside his personal convictions, the public reaction is most interesting.

When one's god dies, his entire world is shaken to the core and it is practically mandatory that everyone else feel bad too. Kobe was uplifted for his exploits on the court, especially his mental toughness, work ethic, and willingness to take the high-pressure shot, no matter the difficulty, results, or critics. He embraced this image by calling himself the "Black Mamba."

But one's legacy is just a reputation, not the Word of God. What people think of someone else does not define reality or mean they are good. Society lifts up a few select people for their achievements, while it criticizes the rest. But is Kobe deserving of our mourning? It is blasphemous to the world to not mourn his death, but biblically, he got exactly what he deserved - as will you.

Christians see death, not as random and untimely, but as release from this world of sin. Did not Job, St. Paul, and many other faithful of God look forward to death in Christ? Is death, in faith, loss or gain? This world is not our hope - we trust the promise of greater life with Christ in glory. The Christian does not avoid death, he believes it has been vanquished in the resurrection of Christ.

For the Christian death is an enemy that has been defeated. But the world mourns because it is in slavery to death - fear holds bar over all caught in sin. *"But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn' "* (Matt. 11:17). The death of a celebrity is a national tragedy. You are expected to put on a great show to display how it hurts, to pretend it is Good Friday - but it is not, nor should this have been unexpected for a sinner. Death is the consequence of sin. It simply proves that Kobe, no matter how deified by fans and the culture, was a poor, miserable, sinner - just like you. His basketball legacy amounted to nothing, in the end. He will not be remembered forever - in fact, only our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, will. How many express sadness and make childish public displays of honour for an adulterer, but care nothing for our righteous Lord's death in the flesh for all mankind? Death shocks the unbelieving world. It cannot get above the tragedy and power of death in its unbelief.

Dealing with Kobe's Christian confession is less clear, despite the reputation of being a churchgoer. He did publicly admit to adultery while in Vail for surgery in 2003, in order to demonstrate his legality, that his fornication was not coerced. In the course of the investigation, all while being married for over two years, he

admitted to regularly fornicating with another woman, in order to demonstrate the alleged illegal sexual activities were “normal” for him, and not denoting assault. That is a stark admission of living as an unbeliever. It does matter how we live in the body Christ promises to resurrect - and Kobe was clearly not living a Christian life at that time. In the immediate interview, “the Los Angeles Lakers standout used profanity and gave graphic descriptions about the encounter” in Vail. This was not a man to look up to or worship. Basketball is a mere game. God does not respect or give preferential treatment to its stars. Is this what the world is really mourning?

While Kobe did “save” his marriage, the “cause” seemed to be laid at the feet of a gift: a “rare 8 carat purple diamond ring that was reported to be valued at approximately 4 million dollars.” Is this ring, given just two weeks after admitting to a pattern of adultery, a sign of repentance? Or is it more like a pay-off or Roman indulgence to get out of marital purgatory? “I know that my husband has made a mistake - the mistake of adultery,” Vanessa, Kobe’s wife, said. “He and I will have to deal with that within our marriage, and we will do so.” Adultery is not simply one “mistake” among many – it breaks the marriage union - and “dealing with it” is not forgiveness in the name of Christ.

Did Kobe ever talk about real repentance for his adultery and living in sin? He seemed to care more for preserving his legacy: “He told the investigators he was concerned about damage to his marriage, his career and his image if word of the rape allegation got out.” “If my wife found out that anybody made any type of allegations against me she would be infuriated.” But adultery is a sin against God and the indwelling Holy Spirit, who made our bodies. It is God’s wrath and our adulterous hearts that we should be mourning.

Kobe had the veneer of Christianity to his earthly life: “One thing that really helped me during that process was talking to a priest and that was the turning point,” Kobe told GQ Magazine. “It was actually kind of funny: He looks at me and says, ‘Did you do it?’ And I say, ‘Of course not.’ Then he asks, ‘Do you have a good lawyer?’ And I’m like, ‘Uh, yeah, he’s phenomenal.’ So then he just said, ‘Let it go. Move on. God’s not going to give you anything you can’t handle, and it’s in his hands now. This is something you can’t control. So let it go.’”

There is nothing Christian about this, in fact, it is of Satan. The “do it” refers only to the crime in the eyes of U.S. courts – rape - not the crime he freely

admitted against God Himself. This Roman priest did not speak God's Word demanding repentance, nor discipline him until true repentance is voiced, as the Bible expects.

We cannot change our past sins but we can turn from them in word and deed. While we do not know a person's heart, and should not judge it, we can judge someone's confession of Christ. Having a great lawyer is worthless before God. But celebrities get special treatment now and it is not likely you will get this kind of posthumous adulation Kobe has gotten - but the praise of God, in trusting His justifying Word is much greater. The world's praise is worthless. God's forgiveness is everything, and the world cannot stand a faithful confession of the biblical Christ: *"If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you"* (Jn. 15:19). We should be suspicious of those the world loves and mourns unconditionally, but attentive to those the world hates and ignores, especially Jesus.

It has been reported that Kobe went regularly to Roman mass, perhaps even on the morning of his death. That is good, if God's Word was spoken and believed. But we have no indication it was confessed by Kobe. In fact, he would have alienated his fan-base and the world for speaking Christ's Word that he was a weak, deadly, adulterous sinner in need of a Saviour. Going to church is an external action, that anyone, even an atheist, can do. But to confess oneself the chief of sinners, and also Jesus as Lord, to the world requires the Spirit.

The Catholic News Agency reports that after these events, Bryant, in 2015, "credited his Catholic faith with helping him move past a challenging period in his own life and the life of his family." "Moving Forward" is the opposite of repentance, which is turning back and away from your own sin and rebellion, towards the living God.

It does not matter what the world says when you leave - or how you leave - as you must for your sin, unless Christ returns first. But Christ, true God, is speaking His Word in the Gospel now. While death did not respect Kobe, we have Christ who swallowed death whole for you. Heed and mourn your sin, dying with Christ, not the just consequences faced by other sinners. Your earthly legacy will not prevent your guilt from the execution of divine justice. Repent and turn to

Christ's forgiveness, before you get what you deserve, of which earthly death is the least of your just deserts.

You deserve the same - do you not? "Tragic" implies undeserved, but your eternal death in hell, along with a temporal death, are quite deserved. The question is: will you repent of your death-deserving deeds before their punishment finds you? Go to church yes, but to hear God, turn from your sins, be forgiven by Christ, and confess Jesus as Lord over death and your sin. *"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved"* (Rom. 10:9-10). Amen.

FROM THE PASTOR:

We shall soon be entering the season of Lent, that sombre time of preparation leading up to the death of Jesus. In our church life, it is a busy time, as we begin our mid-week Lenten Services. I realise that not everyone can make these services, so if you would like copies of the bulletin and sermon from these services, please ask, and I shall make copies available for you.

It appears that the recent rains have extinguished most, if not all, the major fires burning in our country. We must thank our God who has heard our prayers, and continue to ask that we be blessed with good seasons ahead. The drought is far from being broken, but we have had a reprieve for now, and it is lovely to see some greenery again. For all of you who have had perhaps too much rain in a short time which has caused damage to farms and property, I shall continue to pray that God will help you get back on your feet.

Over the next couple weeks, I hope to have Lenten devotional books ready for each family. When these become available, please take one. The next edition of the *Good News* magazine will be available in the coming weeks as well. If you have paid your subscription, you will receive the next copy, but I shall have a few spare copies available for any who has not taken up a subscription.

As always, please keep your eyes on the weekly bulletins for any changes to service times etc.

What Jesus has done for us.

Psalm 103:10 reads, *“He has not treated us as our sins deserve and has not paid us back according to our iniquities.”* So many commercials today urge us to get what we deserve. They tell us that we deserve rewards of financial success, products that ease our living - a visible means to show others what worthy people we are. The appeal is to our self-esteem as shown in our possessions and earthly “things.”

All this appeal to our vanity comes to a screeching halt if we think about what we deserve when it comes to God and our relationship to Him. We hit a block wall when we try to tell Him why we should spend eternity in perfect joy with Him. Why? Because we haven't been perfect! In fact, we are sinful every day of our lives. We aren't going to make it with God - at least not on our own.

But that is not the end of the story. God knew that we would be sinners. He knew that without His help, we would be eternally separated from Him. Because He loves us, instead of giving us what we deserved for our sinfulness, He sent someone to take our place. That someone was His Son, Jesus.

In a way, Jesus did not get what He deserved either. Jesus kept all His Father's commands - perfectly! He was perfectly honest, fair, gentle, unselfish, etc., just as God requires. He deserved to live! And yet, He died. Why? He died in our place, taking our sins upon Himself, and at the same time giving His perfection to us. So, His perfection is our perfection before God. And even though He suffered and died, He also rose again and claimed victory over death for us. Because Jesus rose again, we do not get what we deserve! Because of Jesus we will spend eternity with Him in heaven. Remember what Jesus has done for you this coming Lenten Season.

