

EPHESIANS 1:15–23. (EHV)

This is why, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I never stop giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep praying that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, will give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in knowing Christ fully. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know the hope to which he has called you, just how rich his glorious inheritance among the saints is, and just how surpassingly great his power is for us who believe. It is as great as the working of his mighty strength, which God worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, authority, power, and dominion, and above every name that is given, not only in this age but also in the one to come. God also placed all things under his feet and made him head over everything for the church. The church is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, and especially you, Evan and Hunter:

With one exception that I can remember, I've always had confirmation for the young people at my congregation, wherever I was serving at the time, on a Sunday in the month of May. And I've been amazed time after time how I never needed to go looking for a special text of Scripture to find an appropriate message for Confirmation Sunday. One of the appointed readings for that Sunday always fit the circumstances perfectly.

Today is no exception. We are celebrating the ascension of our Lord Jesus today. What better festival could we celebrate on the day when you publicly profess your faith to your fellow believers and receive Communion with them for the first time? As we celebrate Jesus's ascension, we think of his commission to his disciples to go and make more disciples by baptizing them and teaching them all the truths of his Word. We think of his interceding for us at the Father's right hand. We think of him ruling over all things for our good. We think of his promise to return and to take all believers with him to glory.

Here, as Paul tells the Christians in Ephesus about his prayers for them, he has these ascension truths in mind. And we find that his prayer for them is very appropriate as a confirmation prayer for you, and for all our fellow believers, today.

1. Thanksgiving

Paul first reminds us that we have reason to pray a prayer of thanksgiving today: "That is why ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I never stop giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers." When we have a group of people we know about who have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and love for all the saints, that is, all those who believe in him, that is something to give thanks for.

We are grateful, first, that you have faith in the Lord Jesus. That faith was first given to you in your baptism. Paul says in Colossians 2 that you were "buried with [Christ] in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead." In other words, in baptism your old self was rendered powerless and you received a new self with faith in Jesus.

We also know about that faith not just through the fact of your baptism but through your confessing of that faith, including today. Believing in Jesus is kind of like being a son and having parents. You were a son and had parents from the moment you were conceived and born, and you innately sensed this. You depended on them for things like clothing, food, protection, and comfort. But as you grew and learned to express yourself and matured, you wanted to own your sonship and own that relationship to your parents. You asked questions about them. You learned where they grew up and what it was like for them growing up. You learned what they did for work and what they liked to do in their free time. You learned what their first names were and how your parents met each other and came to be your parents. You learned to say “please” and “thank you” for the things they gave you. They were already your parents, but now you own them as your parents more and more.

A similar thing happens in our faith-life. In baptism, God becomes our Father in the fullest sense, through the gift of faith in his Son as our Savior. From that moment, we depend on him a clean conscience, for peace, for life here on earth and forever in heaven. But as we grow older and mature, we want to own our faith. We want to learn more about God and his Son—who he is, what his characteristics are. We want to study his Word. We want to know more about his blessings that we have always depended on, and how he gives them. We want to hear about the other people he has helped and saved. We want to be able to articulate what we believe about him.

Your parents were the first ones who helped you to do that by saying prayers with you and talking about Jesus with you, by taking you to church and Sunday School. They also sent you to confirmation instruction to enable you to own your faith and articulate your faith. And you both have done that in catechism class. You’ve asked lots of good questions and you’ve looked up and read and discussed lots of passages from God’s word and given answers to questions based on those passages. Heavenly Father, thank you for giving them faith, and thank you for preserving them in that faith and helping them to own that faith!

And thank you for the love they have for other believers. It’s clear that they have love for each other, their fellow catechism students, even if it sometimes devolves into inappropriate joking. It’s clear that they have love for their pastor, even if they don’t always listen when he tells them to settle down. It’s clear that they have love for the fellow believers in their family. It’s clear that they have love for you, their fellow members, in the fact that they come here and worship with you. Some of you interact with them after church. One of you, I won’t say who, interacts with Evan so often, he doesn’t know your name but he simply calls you his “buddy.” Heavenly Father, thank you for the love they have for their fellow believers.

A confirmation prayer has to begin with thanksgiving.

2. Petition

But a confirmation prayer can’t stop there, as if from this day forward you can just coast until the day you die, as if there will be no challenges to your faith and your love in the future. I’ve already told the joke multiple times about the church that had the mouse problem, and so the pastor finally had to get involved and confirm the mice so that they would never come back. One of the reasons that joke resonates is because too often confirmation is viewed as a graduation. I suppose it is, in a way. You have completed a course of study covering the basics of Christian

teaching—the Ten Commandments, the Creed, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, prayer, and the keys of the kingdom of heaven and how to use them.

But in another sense, it’s not a graduation at all. When you graduate from high school, you’re done with high school. You don’t have to go back and retake it. But the things you have learned in Catechism instruction you have not mastered and you will never master your entire life. Even as you grow in God’s word, you will not be able to do so unless you go back and revisit all of these basics again and again and use them as your reference point for everything else you find in God’s word. False teachings and heresies arise when people go astray from the Catechism, and unbelief sets in when people think they have graduated from them and leave them behind.

So we can’t just thank God for your past. We also have to and want to pray about your future. Paul also prays for the future of all the Christians in Ephesus, both young and old, and so we also want to do it for your future: “I keep praying that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, will give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in knowing Christ fully.” He then explains what that means. First he prays: “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know the hope to which he has called you.”

So many people are without hope today. Their world is limited to what surrounds them and what their five senses perceive. So their hope is that they will be able to control their circumstances enough to be happy here on earth until they die. That’s not hope. You have hope, and you know about your hope—the hope of forgiveness, forgiveness for all sins fully and daily, the hope of heaven through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But there is so much more you can know about it. There is more to know about what the hope of heaven is. I myself have been finding in the past few years more and more aspects of heaven to ponder. But there is also much more to learn about just how sure it is, and just how comforting it is in a whole host of situations, especially in difficulties. Heavenly Father, enlighten the eyes of the hearts of these confirmands, so that they may know the hope to which you have called them.

Second Paul prays: “...so that you may know...just how rich his glorious inheritance among the saints is.” Paul is talking about how rich in glory the inheritance is that he has given the saints. As Peter says, our inheritance in heaven is undying, unfading, and undefiled, unlike ourselves and everything we can possibly own and enjoy this side of heaven. It all dies, fades, or has blemishes or gets blemishes, or a combination of those. Not our inheritance in heaven.

But Paul is also talking about how rich in glory our inheritance is that consists of the saints. What a glorious treasure surrounds you in these pews! Here are people who will pray for you and help you when tragedy strikes. Here are people who will be there for you and will offer words of comfort when you lose a loved one. Here are people who will give you unexpected laughs, who will help you to view God’s wonders and blessings with a fresh perspective, who will assure you that you’re not alone in your faith in a world where it seems the number of believers is dwindling by the day. I will be giving you both confirmation gifts today; these people purchased them with their offerings. Maybe one or both of you will end up moving away some day and joining a different Lutheran church in our fellowship and discovering a whole congregation of believers there who will do all of these same things for you, even though they hardly know anything about you except that you’re joined to them by the blood of Christ. And there is so much more that I’m sure you and I and all of us have yet to discover about how rich

and how glorious our inheritance in the saints is. Heavenly Father, enlighten the eyes of the hearts of these confirmands so that they may know what a glorious treasure they have in their fellow saints not just in their heads, but also by experience.

Finally Paul prays: "...so that you may know...just how surpassingly great his power is for us who believe." That knowledge is something that stands to benefit you two more than it even benefits me. I remember sitting in a pastors' circuit meeting once back in Wisconsin. We were talking about social trends that had already started having a negative effect on the church. My circuit pastor, who was a few years away from retirement, looked at us younger guys and said, "I know this much. I'm the right age and you guys aren't." In other words, he figured that the issues we would have to wrestle with in the next ten to twenty years would be harder than any he ever had to face. I could probably in turn say the same thing to you two. I'm the right age and you guys aren't. Who knows what temptations the devil is going to throw at you in high school and college that were never even on my radar, and I can't even imagine what society is going to look like when you're my age.

But although my circuit pastor was probably right, what he failed to mention is what we're praying for you, namely "that you may know...just how surpassingly great [God's] power is for us who believe." Right after this, God actually uses Paul to begin to answer that prayer for you. Here's how surpassingly great God's power is: "It is as great as the working of his mighty strength, which God worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, authority, power, and dominion, and above every name that is given, not only in this age but also in the one to come. God also placed all things under his feet and made him head over everything for the church." Imagine death as two steel chain links the size of this altar. On Easter morning, God snapped it like it was a piece of spaghetti. Imagine what the owners and CEOs of billion-dollar corporations like Walmart, Amazon, and Apple can do with the snap of their fingers or the click of a button. Imagine how politicians and presidents could change your life and mine like that with the implementation of a new policy or law. Think of how much influence popular actors, television hosts, YouTubers, and other influencers wield over their millions of fans and followers. Jesus is not just more powerful and more influential. He is *far* above all of them combined, even far above all the spiritual powers like the devil and his demons. The entire universe is under his feet, and he rules over everything for the good of the Church.

And the Church? "The Church is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." Jesus fills everything, but the Church, gathered around Word and sacrament, is where you find Jesus in his fullness, in his most concentrated form, so to speak. Here is power no one can measure or imitate, the power to change and enlighten hearts and save souls for time and for eternity.

Heavenly Father, enlighten the eyes of the hearts of these confirmands, so that they know just how surpassingly great your power is that your Son exercises at your right hand for them.

This is our confirmation prayer for you, Evan and Hunter, and we pray that it's also your lifelong prayer for us, your brothers and sisters—a prayer of thanksgiving for the gifts of faith and love, and a petition that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened so that we know Christ and his blessings, his promises, and his power better and better and ultimately may know him fully, face to face at his side in heaven. Amen.