

John 16:23-33 May 17, 2020 “Ask” The Fifth Sunday After Easter Rogate

**Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

My dear friends in Christ Jesus,

Today is Rogate Sunday. Rogate is a Latin term which means to “ask” or “call upon”.

On Rogate Sunday in years gone by, farmers and others in the spring of the year would gather in their fields as it was being prepared for seeding, and as seed was been sown. They would pray that God might bless that seed, that rains would come and the sun would shine, so that in due time a good harvest might be had.

Some of us have grown up in rural areas and now as city dwellers we might be less inclined to offer prayers as the seed is planted, that in time a good harvest might be forthcoming. So that prayer for the planting of seed, for seed time and harvest and all other prayer might be encouraged among us-may God the Holy Spirit, bless our study on His Word on this Rogate Sunday as we consider our Lord's words found recorded in John 16:23 **“Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.”**

Many people misunderstand those words of Jesus that I just read. Some say you can ask for anything you want, and as long as you pray it sincerely “in Jesus’ name,” God will grant it to you. This is the “name it and claim it” approach to prayer. If you pray for something by name and claim it as your own and truly believe God will give it to you, then you’ll receive it – be it money or healing or a big house or car or boat. And if you don’t receive it, it is because you did not pray hard enough or your faith was not strong enough.

But that is not what it means to pray in Jesus' name. Prayer in Jesus' name is not a blank check to fulfill all your worldly dreams and passions, much less to satisfy self-serving desires. Christians prayer rather is a heavenly privilege with a heavenly focus and foundation.

To pray in Jesus' name means, first of all, to pray as one who is baptized, as one who is a child of God. In Holy Baptism God put His name upon you, gave you His name, and joined you to Himself through Christ, and made you a member of His family. It is through Jesus that you now have access to God the Father as His children. God hears you just like He hears Jesus. It is the name of Jesus that unlocks the door to the Father's heart, not our sincerity or efforts.

Apart from Christ, heaven was closed to all mankind. Sin put up an impenetrable barrier between us and the Creator that we could not break through or tear down. But Jesus by coming to us from the Father and taking on our human nature, Jesus broke through the sin barrier. Through His perfect life, through His innocent death on the cross and through His glorious resurrection and triumphant ascension back to the Father, He has given us an opening to heaven. There is only one access to God: to come to Him through Jesus. Non-Christian religions, therefore, do not lead to the true God – whether it is Judaism or Islam or Buddhism or the nature religion of Native Americans – for they all reject Jesus as being the incarnate Son of God and the only Savior from sin. And He is the only way to God, as He said, **“No one comes to the Father except through Me.”** (John 14:6)

To pray in Jesus' name means to pray with faith in what Jesus has done to save us, to know that it is only because of His completed work of redemption that we can come before the heavenly throne with our petitions and prayers. To pray in Jesus' name is knowing that Christ is our sole passageway to the Father. Like Moses was for the

people of Israel in the wilderness, so Jesus is our intermediary, our go-between, our peacemaker with God. As the bronze serpent was lifted up in the desert, so our Lord Jesus was lifted up on the cross for you and for me, in order that whoever who looks to Him in faith may be saved from sin and restored to fellowship with the Father. Indeed, Paul in writing to Timothy proclaimed, **“There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all.”** (1 Timothy 2:5)

This, then, is Christian prayer. This is prayer to God our heavenly Father, through Jesus the Savior. Godly prayer is shaped by God’s Word. Prayer in Jesus’ name is prayer that proceeds from faith in Him. And faith never prays “My will be done,” but, “Thy will be done.” Faith trusts that God the Father’s will in Jesus is good and gracious, for the name “Jesus” literally means “Savior.” When we pray in Jesus’ name, therefore, we are asking the Father for all of the saving gifts that have been put into that name which is above every name. All of this and more is what Jesus means when He says, **“Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.”**

So, with this right understanding of Jesus’ words, the question must be asked: Do we take Jesus at His Word? Does this tremendous promise and privilege move us to pray and to seek Him? No, not probably as much as we should. We must confess that sometimes we are lazy in our prayer, or we want to pray but are easily distracted from it by other things. The devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh are always seeking to divert us from prayer. We must therefore prepare ourselves to oppose those things.

Yes, we must heed the encouragement of Holy Scripture to prayer. The Psalmist says, **‘Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will glorify Me.’** (Psalm 50:15). And again, **“Let my prayer come before You, turn Your ear to my cry”** (Psalm 88:2)

In the New Testament also we have the same encouragement, Peter reminds us, **“But the end of all things is at hand, be therefore sober and watchful unto prayer”** (1 Peter 4:7)

Paul, reminded the Phillipian Christians, **“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God”** (Philippians 4:6)

And the Apostles' reminded the Christians at Jerusalem when the seven deacons were chosen, **“But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word”** (Acts 6:4)

And when you are tempted to think that your prayer will do no good, be reminded of Jesus' promise. He said, **“Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full”** (John 16:24). He urgently invites you to come to Him as dear children to a loving Father. If earthly fathers, who are sinners, know how to give good things to their children, how much more will our Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

God will never turn away from a heart that trusts in Him. And even when our prayers in Jesus' name are not answered immediately or in exactly the way we would like, they will all ultimately be answered “yes” in the resurrection, when Jesus comes again to bring us the richness of heaven and the restoration of our bodies and the fullness of joy and peace.

Therefore, St. Paul also encourages us to **“Pray without ceasing”** (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Do not be like the unbelievers who go through their daily activities without ever giving a thought to the God who made them and who died for them. Rather, in your daily tasks, have an attitude of faith and prayer that looks to God with thanksgiving and

relies on Him and calls upon His name in times of need. Though this prayer will often be silent, we should have the practice of praying out loud when we can, even if you are by yourself. Such spoken prayer helps us to focus more clearly and concretely on what we are saying and on the reality of the God to whom we are praying.

Use Luther's Morning and Evening prayers and the meal prayers given you in the Catechism. Pray the Psalms and the Lord's Prayer given you in the Scriptures. The Lord's Prayer is really a summary of all that you have been given to pray for in Jesus' name. Its petitions are broad enough to include all the good gifts that the heavenly Father delights to give His children. From there we can pray more specifically and about our own particular needs and our neighbor's needs and the things for which we want to give thanks to God.

Finally as we journey here below we will never have a shortage of things for which we need to pray in this world. For there will always be troubles or challenges in our life, not to mention temptations seeking to lure us away from Christ, which should move us constantly to seek God's help and protection.

Then there are the opportunities we have to pray on behalf of our family members and friends and fellow workers, not only for their earthly well-being but also for their eternal well-being, that they be brought to the faith or remain steadfast in the faith. Then there are the broader needs of good government, the betterment of our society, the fruitfulness of the earth, preservation from war and famine and disease.

And finally, we should pray for the church. For the church and believers are persecuted in many places and are constantly under assault by false teachers and those wanting her to compromise with the world.

Martin Luther had this to say about praying for the church: “Everyone who loves the Christian church and the Gospel, and is concerned about their well-being, ought to remember that He (God) must help sustain them. We can do this best of all through prayer, praying that the name of our God in heaven be hallowed, His kingdom come, and His will be done; on the other hand that the name of the devil be reviled, his kingdom overthrown, and his will and designs repulsed.

Luther went on to say, “When you do this, then you and every Christian are like warriors on the field of battle with weapons drawn, helping to guard and protect the Christian church against the devil and the world. For every Christian is a soldier who is engaged in battle with the devil. ... May each Christian say to himself: Since prayer is so pleasing to God and so highly essential and beneficial for me and for the church, I shall attend church and pray fervently, for I am confident that prayer is not, nor can ever be, in vain.” (House Postils, Vol. I, p. 110)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, in the world you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer; Jesus has overcome the world. Pray with boldness and confidence in Him who is the Conqueror, who has given you His victory, who has opened the door of heaven to you. Believe Him when He says, **“Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”**(John 16:24)

And may God grant this for Jesus' sake. Amen.