

05/17/20

Rogate, 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Easter

**“Ask and you will receive”**

**John 16: 23b-30**

**23)** “Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. **24)** Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. **25)** These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. **26)** In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; **27)** For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. **28)** I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.” **29)** His disciples said to Him, “See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech! **30)** Now we are sure that you know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth from God.”

Grace be unto you and peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Once again on this fifth Sunday after Easter, our Gospel-text comes from our Savior’s lengthy “Farewell Address” which He delivered to His disciples as they were gathered together for a final time on the Thursday of the first Holy Week. In the upper room where He ate the Passover with them, Jesus spoke in earnest love to His disciples—to prepare them for the dark hours which lay ahead, to give them comfort and strength, and to plant in their hearts and minds the seeds of understanding which would only sprout and grow after His resurrection.

As part of His words of help and encouragement, Jesus makes this extraordinary promise which is also meant for you and me, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you, Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” As Martin Luther noted, we do not have to wonder whether our Father in heaven wants us to speak with Him. We do not have to question whether it is God-pleasing when we address Him in prayer. Right here in our text, we have the command of the incarnate Son of God Himself—“Ask!”—and we are assured by the Virgin’s Son that the Father will grant to us that for which we ask in His name. Jesus wants His people to know that our heavenly Father really does want us to pray—that for the sake of His Son the Father loves us as His own dear children.

## I

“Whatever you ask the Father in My name,” Jesus says, “He will give you.” And He adds, “Until now you have asked nothing in My name.” Until this time when He would return to His Father, on the one hand, His disciples could speak directly to Jesus Himself. And what is more important, it was only now—in His Passion and His resurrection—that the significance of prayer in Jesus’ name would be revealed. Only after they had come to understand and believe in His atoning death and His triumph over the grave would they fully understand what it means to “pray in (His) name.”

Our Savior makes it clear, the precious gift of which He speaks here—the privilege of talking to almighty God as our loving Father, the very blessing which has been bestowed on each one of us in the waters of baptism—is a gift and a privilege which has come to us at great cost, one that would be purchased and paid for by Christ Jesus Himself. “I came forth from the Father and have come into the world,” Jesus says, “Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.” To pray “in (Jesus’) name” is to pray out of faith in the Lord’s Anointed who came from the Father in humble obedience to the Father’s saving will, who became One of us in the womb of the Virgin Mary, who came as our Brother-in-the-Flesh in order to live a life of holiness in our place. To pray “in (Jesus’) name” is to pray out of faith in Him who returned to the Father by way of the cross on the hill Golgotha and by way of the empty tomb. It is to pray out of faith in Him whose blood cleanses us from all sin, and who has smashed the power of death over us. It is Christ Jesus Himself who has paid the great cost so that we might have this gift of prayer in His name.

“In that day,” Jesus says, “you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you.” In the inner councils of the Holy Trinity, our risen and ascended Lord does indeed intercede for His people of faith as our great High Priest, pleading His sacrifice for us and establishing for us this new relationship between us and the Father. So complete is that saving work of Christ Jesus that now you and I pray “in (His) name,” and the Father hears our prayers as coming from Jesus Himself—as coming from His dear children to whom He wants to give what is best.

## II

“Whatever you ask the Father in My name,” Jesus says, “He will give you.” We should note that Christ Jesus Himself has set for us the best example of prayer. Nothing was more characteristic of our Savior’s years of earthly ministry than His speaking with His Father. He taught His disciples to pray and prayed with them. Sometimes He withdrew from the crowds to

be alone and to devote Himself especially to prayer for His Father's help and strengthening. He prayed in thanksgiving before and after healing the sick. He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prayed from the cross. To go to the Father in prayer and to make our requests in the name of Jesus is a vital and most blessed way that we can walk in our Savior's footsteps.

To pray "in (Jesus') name" is to ask for those things for which He has told us to ask in that perfect example of prayer which He has taught us and which covers every aspect of our lives of faith. It is to ask that our heavenly Father would help us hallow His name in all that we say and do, and that He would send His Holy Spirit to work faith in our hearts so that His kingdom would come to us and to all people. It is to pray that His will would be done in our lives—not the will of the devil or of this fallen world or of our own sinful nature. It is to pray that He would give to us the daily bread that we need for this life, that He would forgive us every day for the sake of His Son, and that He would teach us to forgive others in the same way. It is to pray that He would protect us against all temptations, and that He would, finally, deliver us from every evil so that we may live eternally with Him.

And always, to pray "in (Jesus') name" is to pray in absolute trust that our heavenly Father will give to us what is truly best for us—that He will do for us what really serves our eternal welfare. We will not always understand His workings. We will not always receive what we want or what we think we need. A loving father does not always give to his child everything for which the child asks—the new toys or the extra pieces of candy or the special treats which seem so important to the child. To pray "in (Jesus') name" is to trust the love of our heavenly Father—that boundless, divine, saving love for which the cross of our Savior is the indisputable proof.

### III

The disciples' response to Jesus here indicates their mistaken certainty that they understand everything He is telling them. "See," they say to their Friend and Teacher, "now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech! Now we are sure that you know all things...By this we believe that You came forth from God." Our Lord patiently bears their brief moment of misguided overconfidence. He knows that they are still without real understanding, that their thinking would need to be purged by the trials they would endure. He knows that only later would they see clearly. Only after His resurrection and His ascension and His gift to them of the Holy Spirit would they really come to understand the "Word of the Cross" which, as apostles of Christ, they would proclaim to the world. And the sorrows, the fears, the darkness of the soul through which they would go—these would

be necessary to bring home to them the true value of prayer and of the promise which Jesus makes to them here.

It is not wild speculation—and it is not to pretend to read the hidden will of God—to say that surely we, too, can learn from this difficult time of trial about the great worth of Jesus’ promise in our text. To us, too, our Savior says, “Whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Ask!” As Christ’s people of faith, we have this privilege—to address our Creator-and-Savior God as our “heavenly Father,” to entreat His mercy and His loving care for ourselves and our families, and to trust that He will do for us what is best. Along with hearing His Gospel-word, such prayer in the name of our Savior is, as Luther reminds us in a sermon on this text, the highest form of Christian worship. In this time when so much is kept from us and there is so much that we cannot do, this is one thing that even the coronavirus cannot take away from us. We can talk to our heavenly Father in Jesus’ name.

May the Holy Spirit lead us to fill our time with such prayer! Amen.