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Today's homily (Saturday of the Sixth Week of Easter) / Sajnos, nincs magyar fordítás!

(Jn16:23b-28) "Amen, amen, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in my name He will give you." Our Lord's solemn assurance in today's gospel seems too good to be true. After all, many prayers apparently go unanswered. For this reason, there have been various attempts to limit the scope of our Lord's promise. But these endeavors prove superfluous once we process the obvious fact: Christ died for us while we were still His enemies. What, then, won't He give us now that we are His friends? (See Rom5:10) No, we needn't limit the scope of Christ's words, but they still need to be explained!

First, we might note that some people only pray when they want something. Their love is mercenary. But God only gives Himself to us in the measure that we give ourselves to Him. When we're willing to do anything for God, He is willing to do anything for us. If we give God our finite all, He gives us His infinite All. Do the math and it equals everything for next to nothing! The world's salvation hinges on this same logic. God was willing to sacrifice His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, for our sake because Abraham, our father in faith, proved willing to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac, for God's sake. (See Gen22:18) This total Yes-for-yes transaction attains its ultimate perfection in our Blessed Mother Mary, who actually conceived God's coeternal Son in His human nature.

We are all God's children. If there's one thing children don't know, it's what to ask for. Don't laugh, but when I was a child I wanted nail polish remover! After downing the bottle, I had to have my stomach pumped. Had I bothered asking my parents for this tasty elixir, they certainly would have said no. Yet, they wouldn't have denied me any good thing which was in their power to give. For similar reasons, God apparently fails to grant our petitions. They may seem supremely reasonable to us, but He knows better.

The apostles were willing to do anything for God. They gave up everything in this world – family, property, profession – to follow Jesus. In exchange, they only had one petition: Thy kingdom come! But they were deluded. They didn't know what to ask for. They assumed that this kingdom would be an earthly empire. However, instead of worldly success, they shared in Jesus' abysmal failure. The Crucifixion was for them a dark night which stripped away their delusion. Then, the risen Lord appeared to them. This was the hour, mentioned in today's gospel, wherein Jesus would no longer speak to them figuratively. Freed now from their first delusion, they could stand the truth. To the disciples bound for Emmaus, the risen Lord explained from Scripture how the Christ had to suffer. Instead of rebelling at this teaching, their hearts now burned with joy. After Christ's resurrection, God's coming kingdom probably seemed to the apostles something like Eden revisited. In other words, they still entertained some delusions. As Jesus ascended into heaven, the same old petition popped up again in the form of a question: "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts1:6)

Instead of a kingdom restored, the apostles lost its king once again. The Ascension was their second dark night, which stripped away their second delusion. Eden wouldn't be revisited after all! Following each departure, Christ reappeared to the apostles in a more supernatural form. While the risen Lord was sometimes difficult to recognize, after Pentecost, reason failed completely. Faith alone recognized Jesus under the appearances of bread and wine. The apostles had gone from beginners before the Crucifixion, who were downright deluded, to intermediates after the Resurrection, who were only partially deluded, to Christ's perfect disciples after Pentecost, free of all illusions.

In our spiritual life, the dark nights of sense and spirit must also strip away our secret delusions. Only then will we truly know what to pray for. In the meantime, we needn't lose heart. After all, even the petition that the apostles made under the influence of their double delusion was answered – answered beyond their wildest expectations. At Pentecost, the kingdom – Christ's Church – finally did come. Yet, this answer was immeasurably greater than the apostles' initial request. No geopolitical empire can save us from hell, but Holy Mother Church will – provided we don't stand in the way. Were the apostles satisfied with this answer? So exceedingly did they rejoice at Pentecost, that they were mistaken for drunken men. And this, despite the very real prospect of persecution and death.

In our spiritual life, we too must shed our double delusions! Only then will we really know what to pray for. Only then will we truly be eager to do anything for God. Only then can we make St. Paul's words our own: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." (Gal2:20a) Christ asks in me. Amen! St. Bede the Venerable! Pray for us!