

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

Sixth Sunday of Easter [Rogate] (2022)

Ask in the Name of Jesus

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“In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” (John 16:23–24, ESV)

Today is Rogate Sunday, the Sunday of the Church Year which points us to the three days before the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. Since the Church celebrates the Ascension on Thursday, these days; Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of this week are known as the days of Rogation: that is days of repentance and prayer. Therefore, on this Rogate Sunday, the Old Testament Reading, the Epistle Reading, the Gospel Reading, and the Introit all encourage us to pray. Moreover, the Gospel for today reminds us of the promise Jesus gave to His Church, saying: ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.” (v. 23)*** Our Lord also says, ***“Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” (v. 24)*** So the Gospel for today urges us to pray, which begs the question, what is true prayer?

It has been said that prayer is a conversation with God. and this is true; however, we must remember that prayer is also a universal practice, it is common to men; all the world prays but not all pray to the same god. Many who pray in this world are not having a conversation with the One, true God. In this world there is Hindu prayer, Muslim prayer, Buddhist prayer, and many other man-made prayers to man-made gods. Even the atheist prays seeking his hopes and desires by praying to the only god he knows, his inward self. Thus, the world prays to gods of infinitely different perceptions. But our Lord Jesus tells His followers to pray only to His Father, praying only in His name. That is, the Christian prays to the God of heaven and earth, the God of Creation, to the God whose Son opened His Father’s heart by His atoning sacrifice on the Altar of the Cross so that His Father would hear our prayers offered in the name of His beloved Son Jesus and answer them. Yet even this biblical truth finds markedly different opinions within Christian denominations concerning true prayer. Therefore, let us pray this morning, as we *Ask in the Name of Jesus*, that the Holy Spirit will open our ears and hearts to understand the biblical truth of Christian prayer.

As I have said, prayer is a universal, religious rite stemming from man’s needs and his inability to obtain those needs by his own capability. Therefore, humanity prays because of need or relief, addressing their prayers to the one they believe can answer their petitions. However, because the nature of man is corrupt and inward looking, he is unable to rely on the compassion and mercy of his fellowman, so prayers are primarily directed to some divinity. Yet even here, because of man’s fallen nature, his prayers are offered with caution, with uncertainty, even with skepticism. Prayer is often accompanied with the question, is there really a god to hear me? Are we speaking only to ourselves or if there is a god, does he care enough to answer my prayer?

Despite these uncertainties, it is human to pray, but very few prayers are offered in the name of Jesus. Thus, here we find the difference between “instinctive prayer” and the “prayer of faith.” A “prayer of faith” is one offered in the Name of Jesus with the assurance that He will hear. Moreover, a “prayer of faith” also is heard by and is pleasing to God.

“Instinctive prayer” is revealed in Holy Scripture. During Old Testament times it was not just the people of Israel who prayed, but their neighbors also bowed their heads to a variety of gods who they believed could help them, deliver them, and defend them. These neighbors of Israel did not know or believe in the one true God, yet instinctively they believed there was a god or gods who controlled their lives. This is the result of the revelation of God in creation. Marveling at the wonders of Creation they were certain that a god or gods existed. So their prayers were offered, instinctively to imaginary gods. We see this also in the New Testament. St. Paul encountered the religious pagans of Athens who prayed to the **“unknown god.”** (*Acts 17:22*) They appealed instinctively to an unsure and unknown divine entity. Old Testament gentiles and New Testament pagans prayed, but they did not know the gods to whom they prayed. This truth now changes the impact of the question “What is prayer?” to now focus on the object of prayer, asking, “Who is the God to whom we pray? Who is the God that answers our prayers?”

It has been said, “Man is a beggar before God” but a beggar never knows the heart of those from whom he begs. Therefore when men have only a natural knowledge of God, they are uncertain to whom they pray. But a child of God is different because they have been given the gift of faith to believe in the One, True, Triune God, by hearing God’s inerrant, infallible, and inspired Word. Now, not only are they known by God, but He has opened their hearts and minds to believe in Him. Now, they are not just known but they also know the God to whom they pray, the holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the God of heaven and earth who is revealed in Holy Scripture.

The Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is clearly shown in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament the numerous references to the **“Spirit of God”** refer to the Holy Spirit, and the Son is promised in Genesis (Gen. 3:15) and in the Psalms, Daniel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other places. In the New Testament God says at the Baptism of Jesus, **“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”** (*Matthew 3:17, ESV*) and John the Baptist declares, **“he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on;”** Jesus (*Matthew 3:16, ESV*) Furthermore, the apostle John declares, **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”** (*John 1:1–3, ESV*) **“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”** (*John 1:14, ESV*) Jesus says, **“I and the Father are one.”** (*John 10:30, ESV*) and He promises to send the Holy Spirit after His departure (John 16:7). Furthermore, at His ascension, our Lord Jesus gave His Church this command, **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,”** (*Matthew 28:19, ESV*)

When you were Baptized, you were baptized into the Trinity: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. You were made a child of the Trinity, a child of God, brothers, and sisters to Jesus Christ, and you were given the gift of the Holy Spirit who took up residency in your heart. So when you pray to the Father in the name of Jesus, you pray to the One who has renewed you, regenerated you, cleansed you of all sin, drowned you in the crucifixion of Christ and raised you to new life in the resurrection of Christ. In those blessed waters God adopted you and now leads you to live as an adopted child of His in His kingdom of life everlasting. Therefore, as a child of God, when you pray, you are praying to God, your heavenly Father, asking Him in the name of His beloved Son Jesus Christ, to answer your petitions with the assurance of the faith He has given you. This, then, is the “prayer of faith.”

When the apostles asked Jesus to teach them to pray, He said, **“Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.”** (*Matthew 6:9, ESV*) Pray to the Father, but when you pray **“ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.”** (v.23)

As a justified child of God you are invited throughout Scriptures to pray. Unceasingly, God urges you to pray, to commune with Him by words of the mouth or silently, from the heart. Either way He will hear you. Your desire for prayer, this longing for a conversation with God, is a result of the Holy Spirit living within you. Luther says prayer for the Christian is as common as breathing, as continuous as the beat of your heart. Moreover, prayer is not the response of emotions or feelings, but rather prayer is engendered in the heart of a child of God who desires to converse with the One who is gracious and merciful, to the One who has created them, redeemed them, and sanctified them.

Moreover, when a child of God prays, they pray to God for everything that is covered by God's divine will and promise. Praying in this way assures the Christian that they shall receive what they pray for, for all that they *Ask for in the Name of Jesus*. But unscriptural prayers must be avoided. Prayers addressed to saints, prayer that borders on covetousness, prayers that seek ungodly mammon, or seek the harm of others must be avoided, these are not in accordance with God's will and promise. Therefore, when a child of God prays, they should pray for intercession, for forgiveness, for thanksgiving, for spiritual blessings, and for the proclamation of the Gospel that others may be saved, and they should pray for the welfare of the church, family, neighbors, and the world. They should pray as St. Paul urges Timothy, telling him, ***"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 Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time." (1 Timothy 2:1–6, ESV)*** Heeding the advice of Jesus we should ***"pray that [we] may not enter into temptation."*** (*Matthew 26:41, ESV*) and that we should pray fearlessly, ***"praying at all times in the Spirit . . . making supplication for all the saints."*** (*Ephesians 6:18, ESV*) Such prayer is acceptable and received by God.

Our Lord Jesus tells us that whatever we *Ask in His Name* the Father will give, and this is most certainly true. But there is something that has been given to us for which we did not ask yet received, and that is to be justified by God the Father for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ. This gracious and merciful act of God has brought us to the state where our prayers offered in faith, are heard and answered.

In the Gospel Reading for today Jesus tells His apostles, ***"I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father."*** (*John 16:28, ESV*) Jesus made this journey for one reason, to save you from the sin that separates you from His Father. The Second Person of the Trinity, became the Incarnate Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary, to remove the barrier that separated man from God. He is ***"the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*** (*John 1:29 ESV*). He is, ***"the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame."*** (*Hebrews 12:2, ESV*) He joyfully and willingly went to the Altar of the Cross to give His life for yours, to offer Himself as the final sacrifice for the forgiveness of your sins and thereby reconciled you to His heavenly Father, your Mighty and Righteous God. His death breached the gap that sin has caused between man and God so that man could once more be in full communion with the Father. Today that communion is accomplished through God's Means of Grace, and we prepare for that communion through the blessed gift of prayer as we approach the Mercy Seat of God where Jesus urges us to pray. Humbly falling to our knees, we bring our petitions before God our Father in the name of His beloved Son Jesus Christ assured that He will hear and answer our prayers.

Prayer, what a marvelous gift! And what a marvelous reminder this Rogate Sunday is leading us in repentance and prayer for the next three days, as we await the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.