

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 Sunday} (2021)

The Foundation of Christian Prayer

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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)

Besides today being Rogate Sunday, it is also Mother’s Day. So let me first say Happy Mother’s Day to all you mothers out there. May all your children give thanks to God for in you God formed them and knitted them together, fearfully, and wonderfully making them, giving them both a body and soul (Ps. 139:13). To which we cannot help but declare, ***“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” (Romans 11:33, ESV)*** There is no end to His goodness.

Rogate, this is a word strange to most of our ears. It is a word derived from the Latin word *rogare*, which means “to ask” thus, to pray, but all too often we hear people say, “Why should I pray, it doesn’t do any good. God never answers my prayers.” Such language comes from a horrible failure to understand what prayer is. Such language is a submission, a surrender to Satan. He loves to hear people speak this way. If you’re not praying, you’re not speaking to God, you’re not communicating with Your heavenly Father who desire nothing more than to hear and help His dear children. If you’re not praying you are subjecting yourself to the world and the ruler of this world, the devil.

Prayer is God’s way of creating an inseparable connection between Himself and the Christian. When a person is justified by faith, becoming a follower of Christ, they become a child of God and the door of communication is opened through prayer. God opens the Christian’s heart that they may have a conversation with Him. The heart, which has been filled by the Holy Spirit, leads the Christian to put together words with which they may address God by their mouth or by their mind. Indeed, a Christian prays even when they are not conscious of praying, even when they imagine they can’t pray because of some terrible grief or sorrow. Therefore, prayer is a precious gift given to the Christian by God that they may address Him, bring Him their petitions, their desires, their confession, and their intercessions. *Prayer is Foundational for the Christian.*

Luther tells us, *“Where there is a Christian, there is the Holy Ghost, who is always engaged in prayer. For though the Christian does not continually move his lips to utter words, nevertheless the heart is beating and pulsating like the arteries and the heart in the body, unceasingly sighing: O dear Father, may Thy name be hallowed.”* The world, our flesh, and Satan continue to attack us, bringing trials and tribulations into our lives, As the world continues to crowd in upon us, our sighing’s become louder, taking on audible tones and finally changing to audible words of prayer. Just as it is impossible to find a living person without a pulse, you cannot find a Christian who is not always praying. Prayer beats in their heart continuously.

Now, one might ask, how can a sinner dare speak to God? How can a sinner consider himself a child of God? To find the answer to these questions we need only to search God’s Word. Therein, we find that faith comes from hearing the Word of Christ (Rom. 10:17) and that no one can confess Jesus as Lord without the indwelling Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). Furthermore, we are

led to confess with the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed, *"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."* Thus, this same Holy Spirit who teaches us to believe that we can't believe on our own is the same Spirit who teaches us how to pray and helps us in our prayers. Furthermore, St. Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit is eager to lead us in prayer, saying, ***"The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."*** (Romans 8:26–27, ESV)

Therefore, as a child of God, our heavenly Father helps us to pray to Him. He along with His Son, Jesus Christ, sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts, opening them that we may receive His precious gift of faith in the atoning sacrifice of His Son upon the Altar of the Cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Therefore, we are eager to establish this new found family relationship through dialogue. Oh not a dialogue with earthly communication, but a dialogue between God who calls and faith which hears. In the midst of our troubles, our cares, our tribulations, even our thanksgiving, God continuously calls, calling us to pray and the heart, which is filled with faith, hears and responds.

To be certain, there is no prayer without this divine connection. Jesus tells us that since we are adopted children of God, we are to, ***"Pray . . . like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."*** (Matthew 6:9, ESV) This relationship leads us to pray with boldness and confidence knowing our heavenly Father desires to answer our prayer, to come to our aid, to comfort our soul and bring it healing. Again, Jesus tells us, ***"Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."*** (John 14:13–14, ESV) And the writer to the Hebrews affirms that we can, ***"with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*** (Hebrews 4:16, ESV) So God calls upon us to pray to Him in our hour of need and in times of joy and thanksgiving.

Thus, *the Foundation of Christian Prayer* is a heart changed by the Holy Spirit to be filled with faith, faith that both bids the heart to pray and to believe that God will hear its prayer. Thus, prayer presupposes faith. Only faith in the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake makes a prayer a prayer *"in the name of Christ,"* and only a prayer in the name of Christ has God's command and promise. Our text this morning affirms this when Jesus says, ***"Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you."*** (John 16:23, ESV) It is only because of the work of Christ that we have the boldness to approach God in the first place. Luther said, *"Without communion with Christ no one can pray even one word which would count before God or be pleasing to Him."* Only faith in Christ assures the petitioner that their prayer will be heard.

Prayer which does not flow from faith in the reconciling death of Jesus is not a valid prayer but only an emotional reaction. Prayers without faith are not the result of the Holy Spirit, whose work is to glorify Christ. Christless prayer is prayer of the devil, who works and lives in all unbelievers (Eph 2:2). St. Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, reminds us, ***"what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons."*** (1 Corinthians 10:20, ESV)

Therefore, since an unbeliever denies the vicarious satisfaction of Christ, the very thing that distinguishes Christian prayer, his prayer lacks the prerequisite to make prayer a prayer to God

our Father through Jesus Christ. God answers prayer and forgives sin only for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ, not for any other man-made god, idol, or unbelief. Only by inscribing in the heart of man the divine verdict of justification, thereby rescinding His wrath and condemnation, will the Holy Spirit create faith in the heart. Thus, unbelievers who are filled with guilt, sadness, or troubled consciences have no trust in a God they do not know, a God who would hear and answer their prayers if they but believed in His Son's atoning sacrifice upon the Altar of the Cross.

The Foundation of Christian Prayer is faith wrought by the Spirit. Through faith the Holy Spirit leads you to prayer. Throughout the Gospels Jesus says: having received the Holy Spirit, who brought you to faith in Me, your heart is now assured of God's grace. Therefore, when I said, **"Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."** (*John 14:9, ESV*) you believe that your prayer in my name will flow from your enlightened heart and be heard by the Father. This is the true and proper work of the Christian, and of Christians only. The natural heart says to God: Look at how virtuously I live, how much I suffer, how much adoration I heap upon the merits of the saints, or the intercession and good works of pious people. When we pray in this way there is no faith in the divine grace and mercy of God for Christ's sake; thus the heart is uncertain and cannot be assured that it is heard by God. It wants to deal with God only on the bases of its holiness, or the holiness of others, but not upon the holiness of Christ. It is as if God ought to humble Himself before them, falling on His knees on account of their works and their merit, and be forced to bestow His grace upon them. Their prayer tries to make God a Debtor or a Servant. Such prayer, such attitude does not merit grace, but wrath; it is not prayer, it is mocking God.

But Christian Prayer is first and foremost prayer that flows from faith in Christ Jesus. The prayers of the saints are always based on the righteousness of Christ, on God's grace, on mercy for the sake of Christ, and never on their own worthiness. Today and forevermore, Christians pray disregarding their unworthiness while relying on Christ's worthiness. This is where the confidence and boldness to pray comes from, this is the *Foundation of Christian Prayer*. A Christian prays solely from the reconciliation gained for them by Christ, and because of God's command and promise to hear them.

Therefore, do not hesitate to pray and do not fear that you will not know what to say or ask. St. Paul reassures you such fear is unwarranted, saying, as I said before, you may not know what to say or to pray for, but the Holy Spirit will come to your aid, interceding for you with groanings too deep for words. He will lead you in prayer.

Hold fast to the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, knowing that because your prayer flows from faith in Christ they are efficacious. **"For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,"** (*1 Timothy 2:5, ESV*) Today Jesus sits at the right hand of God as your Mediator interceding for you with the Father, receiving your prayers and making them pleasing to God. Trust in God, trust in your prayers. Don't let Satan discourage you, leading you away from prayer, leading you to believe that prayer has no value. God is merciful and just, He hears the prayers of His saints.

Jesus seeks to save the lost and to bind the broken-hearted, one sure way He does this is through prayer, therefore, **"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit."** (*1 Thessalonians 5:16–19, ESV*) In the name of Jesus. Amen.

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