

Rogate

9 May, Anno Domini 2021

St. John 16:23-30

Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit.

I think more than anything else, doubt and uncertainty are what keep us from prayer. We hesitate because we are unsure that what we're asking for is what God wants. We open our mouths to pray and then shut them again because the devil quietly whispers "What makes you think God would listen to someone like you? Do you honestly think that after the way you've acted, God is just going to give you what you ask for? How do you even know that you're praying for the right thing? Maybe you're asking for something bad." Or maybe you've fallen into the lie that God will only help you if you've first sufficiently demonstrated that you've given it your best effort. We pause because we think that God only listens to carefully crafted and executed prayers, prayers that ask only for lofty, heavenly things in lofty, heavenly ways. We're not a hundred percent certain that God actually does love and care for us, either because we know we don't deserve it or because we think it's a bit of a stretch that Almighty God, who created the vast universe with all its stars and planets, is interested in our problems and petty issues. Perhaps you've even caught yourself wondering if there actually is a God, if you're the only one who actually hears your prayers, that, like the pagans, you're just putting things out there in the universe, as though the universe is listening and helping you.

Jesus knows the doubts that plague you, the same doubts that plagued the disciples. He knows that at the very root of your doubt lies your sin and at the root of all your sin lies the unbelief that still lurks in your flesh and squelches your cries and thanksgiving. He knows that you are reluctant to believe all that the Father has promised to you because you have suffered, sometimes in very terrible ways. He also knows that simply shaking His finger at you and ordering you to pray is only going to drive you further away from prayer. After all, God already commanded you to pray in the Second Commandment when He told you not only to not misuse His Name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks. But we don't. The commandment never brings forth good works. It only shows the evil our hearts.

Repent. The Father Himself loves you. Did you hear that? God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible, loves

YOU. You matter to Him. You are important to Him. He is concerned with everything about you and He will make sure that you have absolutely every good and every perfect gift that you need. He made you. He keeps you. He has redeemed you from death. Yes, you have sinned against Him. We certainly don't **deserve** anything from our Father. If anything, we deserve fiery serpents. We have done everything He has told us not to do. We have despised His Word and the gifts of salvation. We have arrogantly acted as though we are our own creators, masters of our own fates. We have wasted His gifts on meaningless earthly things, even sinful things. We rarely say thank you. And we have all grumbled against God. With our Israelite fathers we have loathed the food that God has given - the food that nourishes our bodies as well as the food that nourishes our souls.

But the Father loves you. He loves you with an eternal, divine, perfect love. He doesn't love you by giving you stuff, though He does that too, every day, in more ways than we could even begin to count. Don't reassure yourself of God's love by looking around and seeing how good or how bad you have it. Being well off and free of problems doesn't prove God's love any more than poverty or terminal cancer or losing your child proves that God hates you. God has loved rich people and poor people, upstanding citizens and drug-dealers, all in the same way - He forgives us our trespasses by sacrificing His Son Jesus Christ.

God the Father loves you because Jesus has died to forgive your doubting, your grumbling, and your loathing. He has saved you from yourself and your own foolishness. He gave you what you never would have asked for because your sinful flesh would never desire it - salvation. From before the foundation of the world, God prepared your salvation, He had already chosen the Lamb He would offer as the atoning sacrifice for your life - His only and beloved Son. Jesus Christ raised up on the pole of the cross is the only place where you can look and be assured beyond all doubt that God loves you. It's why I love crucifixes and why I have one in my study right in front of the places where I pray and where I study - to remind me why I pray, why I study, and to drive away the doubts and uncertainty that arise. There on the cross the Son of God poured out His blood for sinners like you and me. There your Savior bore the terrible burden of all your sin so that you wouldn't bear any of it. Jesus' cross is the definitive Word from the Father that He loves you - that He wouldn't spare even His Son so that you could be with Him for all of eternity and so that your heart might be moved to call upon Him in every time of need, even as Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane. That is His will for all men - that they would look to the cross and be saved from the damning consequences of their sin, that having been bitten by the fiery judgment

of the Law against their sins, they might lift up their eyes to Jesus and in His death know the peace that passes all human understanding.

That is why you pray. You pray because Jesus has died for you and now lives. You pray with boldness and confidence, with absolute certainty because of Good Friday and Easter. You pray because you are a child who has needs, whether it be forgiveness or healing or help on a test or finding work or facing death. You pray, not just because you have to, but because you can, because Jesus has shown you by thorns and nails that the Father loves you and that His will is for your good - temporally and eternally. You pray because as a baptized child of God, you know and believe that you are God's beloved child, that He is pleased with you, that He loves to hear your voice, that He cares about every detail of your life even more than you do. You pray because the Blood of Jesus which we drink today at our Father's table, is the unchangeable promise that your Father will never keep good things from you, that He will never hold your sins against you. Even the trials and serpents that come and cause you pain - the unfaithful and unbelieving spouses, the dark days and nights of depression, the empty bank accounts, the greedy politicians - all of them your Father uses to draw your eyes away from yourself and back to the cross.

Whatever your need is, pray, not as a last-ditch effort, not worrying about getting the words just right, and not doubting but firmly believing that your sins are forgiven and that your heavenly Father loves you. Ask. You will receive and your joy will be full.

In the Name of +Jesus.