

Rogate
22 May, Anno Domini 2022
St. John 16:23-30
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

When you know you're about to die you don't mince words. There isn't any time for beating around the bush. You say what needs to be said. That's exactly what Jesus did. He spoke to the apostles and to the Church exactly what we need in these gray and latter days as we wait for our Savior's return. Though we are now in the season of Easter liturgically, we are going back to the night of Jesus' betrayal and the final hours of catechesis that Jesus delivered to the disciples as our Lord faced His imminent death. We do this because Jesus was speaking to the Church as we exist now, suffering under the constant and assault of the devil and the world that crucified our Savior. The Church is battered about. We are daily under assault. Our flesh threatens to betray us at every turn.

As we look through chapters 13-16 of St. John's Gospel, it is quite amazing how central Jesus' teaching on prayer actually is. Prior to the text before us today, three other times Jesus speaks of prayer. Here those are together:

From 14:13-14 - "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."

From 15:7 - "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

From 15:16 - "You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you."

Then it seems to culminate in chapter 16 where we hear again the following instructions from Jesus: "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...In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God."

There are a couple very clear threads running through all these words. First, Jesus clearly assumes that His disciples will pray. He never says "If you pray..." Certainly we are commanded by God to pray. That is the second commandment by which God teaches us that the way to use His holy name correctly is to call upon it in every need. Not only have you been graciously invited to pray but God commands you to pray. You may not feel like it. You may not feel worthy. But God clearly says "Pray. Call upon Me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you." To pray is to confess that you believe all of God's promises in Christ. To refuse to pray is to deny Christ's death for you and to deny that you need God's help.

Several times Jesus simply says "Ask". That's all prayer really is. It's asking. It's placing your needs before God and asking that He provide help because you know that He alone can and will help - not you, not your spouse, not your income. The command to pray is simply an incredible invitation to stand confidently before the God of heaven and earth as a dear child before his dear father, with all boldness and confidence and ask for His divine help, not just for yourself but for everyone, as St. Paul says.

And what are we supposed to ask for? "Whatever". Four different times Jesus says "whatever you ask." There is essentially no limitation on prayer. You have need? Then ask your Father. In your prayers you should be praying for the government at all levels here and throughout the world. You should be praying for your brothers and sisters in Christ scattered throughout the world. You should be praying for the pure preaching of the Gospel that the kingdom of God may come and remain in your midst and spread throughout our community and the world. You should be praying for your family, your daily bread, and a blessed death in faith. You should be praying for your pastor and for all faithful pastors. You should be praying for those you disagree with. You should be praying for an end to war and bloodshed. You should be praying that your children remain steadfast in the faith and find godly spouses. You should be praying that God would silence all false teachers so that none would be led astray. You should be praying that abortion would stop and that godly marriage would be upheld and defended. You should be praying for those struggling with besetting sins and addictions. You should be praying for the poor and needy. You should be praying against the enemies of God and His Church that their plans would come to nothing. You should be praying that you not become overcome by apathy, a love of riches, despair, or pride.

The one limitation that Jesus places on prayer (and this is the third theme in His teaching) is that it be asked in Jesus name. Now, clearly, just tacking on “in Jesus’ name” at the end of the prayer isn’t what Jesus is talking about. His name isn’t magical. It’s not the secret password to unlock heaven. It doesn’t make sin okay. To pray in Jesus’ name is to pray according to who He is, what He has taught, and what He has done and promises to do. If you pray for revenge on someone because they sinned against you, if you pray that God provide you a way to be unfaithful to your spouse, you can be 100% certain that God will not hear that prayer or grant it. In fact, His will will then be against you. Sin is never in keeping with the name of Jesus. But daily bread, forgiveness, mercy, the Holy Spirit, the furtherance of God’s kingdom - all these things are in keeping with Jesus’ Name and we would have none of them if they weren’t given to us by our Father.

The fourth theme is the constant promise that we will receive whatever we ask in Jesus’ name. **YOU WILL RECEIVE** all those things up to and including the Holy Spirit who gives every blessing of Christ and leads you into all truth. Where is there any room left for doubt with these words of Jesus? Why is there any hesitation on our part to cry out to our Father in our needs? He wants and commands us to and then promises to give what we ask in accord with Christ! Reason simply can’t make any sense of this. Who are we to ask God for even a morsel of bread, let alone forgiveness and salvation? We haven’t loved God. We haven’t obeyed. We haven’t done anything that should make God want to even listen to us, let alone answer us with anything but a thundering “NO!” Our voices should sound to God like nails on a chalkboard. Instead, they sound like the precious voice of His dear and beloved children. Our prayers are like sweet smelling incense in His nostrils.

This is why Jesus’ words today are so absolutely crucial and can’t be given too much of our attention. There is one reason, and one reason only that you should boldly and confidently ask God for anything. Every request should have as its source and its foundation the day in which Jesus spoke in the plainest possible about the Father saying “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” That day, the day when all your sins met their bitter end as God turned His face away from His Son and abandoned Him to death, is the day that God turned His face toward you and opened His ears to hear your cries. If you think you can only pray after proving your value and worth to God, you will never be heard. That prayer will fall straight into the abyss of hell because it is prayer that is not covered in the Blood of God’s atoning Lamb. Jesus’ death is the plainest and purest preaching of the Father’s love for you. It IS His love for you. There, in no uncertain terms do you see His

desire to spare you from eternal death, His desire to put your sins away from you, and have you call upon Him as His dearly beloved child.

You have needs and so do your neighbors. There isn't a person in this room who doesn't. Some we have in common. Some we don't. We ought not rob one another of our prayers. That is why we have the opportunity to pray for specific needs during the common Prayer of the Church and why we have the prayer chain so that we can pray for one another's needs. You have been spared from judgement and death by the Body and Blood given to you in Holy Communion from the altar of Jesus' cross. Dear children of God, pray. Your Father takes the greatest pleasure in hearing your voice and in meeting your needs. He is so serious about it that He made it the second commandment: "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord, your God...pray, praise, and give thanks." Don't let your sin, sin that Christ has already paid for, silence you. Boldly make your requests known to God the Father because the Father Himself loves you. You don't need someone more merciful than Jesus. That person doesn't exist. All the mercy and all the reason you need to pray has been given to you in the waters of Baptism where you were covered and cleansed by Christ's Blood.

Beloved baptized children of the heavenly Father, pray. Your Father loves you.

In the Name of +Jesus.

(We stand.)