

Rogate  
14 May, Anno Domini 2023  
St. John 16:23-30

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

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Beloved of God,

The words of Jesus before us today continue His teaching to the apostles in the upper room the night of the Lord's Supper, the night when Jesus' crucifixion was only hours away. These last hours of catechesis deserve the special attention that we give them during Easter because they are spoken to the Church as we exist now, suffering under the constant hatred 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. 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.

For four chapters, Jesus has been teaching the disciples after having instituted the Lord's Supper and washed their feet. This is now the fourth time in these final hours that Jesus has specifically made promises regarding prayer, asking the Father. Here they 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."

And today, from several different verses of 16: “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 repeatedly commands us, the Church, to pray. 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. The command to pray is simply an incredible invitation to stand confidently before the God of heaven and earth and ask for His divine help, not just for yourself but for everyone, as St. Paul urges the Church to do in his letter to Timothy.

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. And this is exactly what we do in the Prayer of the Church during the Divine Service.

The only limitation is this (and this is the third theme in Jesus’ words) - 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. 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. Sin is never in keeping with the name of Jesus. But daily bread, forgiveness, mercy, the Holy Spirit - all these things are 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. 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 feared, loved, and trusted in Him with our whole heart. 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.

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. They aren't all the same, though we do have many needs in common. 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.

Pray. Pray for heavenly things and for earthly things. Pray with your family. Pray for your family. Pray for the glory of God's Holy name. Pray for your neighbors. Pray for the Church. Pray for your pastors. Pray. Your Father loves you.

In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keeps your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.