

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter    5/26/19  
John 16:23-33            C

## SERMON TEXT: WORDS OF GOSPEL LESSON: 16<sup>TH</sup> CHAPTER JOHN'S GOSPEL

The prophet Isaiah had some very striking words for those who worship false gods:

[The carpenter] cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it. Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, "Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!" And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!" (Isaiah 44:14-17)

How silly we say – to pray to a block of wood. How could anyone believe that block of wood is a god who has not only the ability to hear prayer, but also the power to grant that prayer and grant salvation? Who would be foolish enough to pray to a god that they themselves have made out of wood, or stone, or whatever?

Ah ... but what happens when the false god is a little more sophisticated? What about Eastern meditation? What about the prayers of Moslems to Allah? These are prayers to a false god, a god that is just as made up as a god that is made from a block of wood.

People often talk about the power of prayer as though prayer were some sort of magic spell -- "abracadabra," and POOF – our every wish is granted. The fact is is that there is no power in prayer itself. The power of prayer is in the person to whom we pray.

Today is Rogate, Prayer, Sunday. Rogate Sunday teaches us that prayer is speaking to God in words and thoughts.

It is important that we pray to the true God because if we pray to a false God, it is like sending a letter sent to the wrong address, or an email to the wrong address. It just doesn't get there.

[Here: pray wheels / katmandu](#)

In a similar way, words intended for a false god have no place to go. Words addressed to the nature god of the Wiccans or to the generic god of the Unitarians, or to the god of the Mormons, or to Allah, the god of Islam, or to any false god, do no good. No matter how sincere the words are, they have no effect, because their intended recipient doesn't exist -- they are like Isaiah's block of wood.

Prayer is the cry of faith. The only God who can answer our prayers is the God who actually exists. In order for words to become a prayer, they must be prayed to the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In Catechism, the most important thing we learn is to rightly distinguish between Law and Gospel. Simply, the Law is what God commands of us in our thoughts, words, and deeds and the Gospel is simply what God has done and still does for in the Christ. So, we get to the Lord's Prayer and the students have a tendency to say it is Law, because we are doing the praying. The Lord's Prayer is not Law, it is Gospel, precious Gospel. Yes, we are doing the praying, but it is Gospel because God has the power and authority to grant us our prayers.

Maybe the question for us this Rogate Sunday is "Why," why should the Almighty God listen to our prayers? How can we be important to God? If that were not enough, we are also filthy with sin. Our sin has separated

us from God and made us His enemies. Why should He listen to our prayers?

This is where the words of today's Gospel bring such comfort. Jesus not only tells us to pray to God, but He even teaches us to call God our Father. When He taught us to pray, Jesus taught us to begin with the words, "Our Father Who art in heaven." Our Small Catechism teaches us, "By these words God would tenderly encourage us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that we may ask Him confidently with all assurance, as dear children ask their dear father."

Jesus says, "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." The key is that we are asking in Jesus' name. It is Jesus' name that opens the way for our prayers to come before God.

Jesus is God's only-begotten Son, who took on human flesh. He took upon Himself all our sin that separated us from God and made us His enemies. For that sin, He was beaten, and mocked, and crowned with thorns. Then, He allowed Himself to be nailed to the cross. All the wrath and anger of God against our sin was poured out on His only-begotten Son so that it would not fall on us. But His blood, His suffering, His death, Jesus has atoned for our sin so that are forgiven. The sin that separated us from God is gone in the blood of Jesus.

And the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, Jesus rose again from the dead, destroying death and opening heaven to us.

That means, Dear Saints of God, that heaven, God's throne of grace, is open to our prayers. When we ask in Jesus' name, we are saying that Jesus has atoned for our sin, it is gone in Him, and we are reconciled to our

Father in heaven. Because God loves us, He is eager to hear our every word. Remember, He is not just our Father, He is our dear Father.

As we live out our earthly lives, walking by faith, prayer is the cry of faith in every joy and sorrow of earthly life. The Bible encourages us, "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need," (He 4:16).

We are privileged to take our fears, concerns, cares, troubles, and joys directly to our Father in heaven to thank Him, unburden ourselves, and ask His help and guidance. In our prayers, we should ask for everything that tends to the glory of God and to our own and our neighbor's welfare, both spiritual and bodily blessings. We should also praise and thank God for who He is and what He has done. We should pray for ourselves and for all people, even for our enemies. But, we do not pray for the souls of the dead, for as the Bible teaches us "It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment (He 9)."

In our Christian life, we should pray regularly and frequently, especially in times of trouble. "Cast all your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you," the Psalmist says in our Introit this morning.

Which is important for all of us who walk by faith to remember, but especially for our graduates to cherish. These are the graduates who were members of a very special confirmation class. Well, maybe "special" isn't the correct words to use because they were the confirmation class that attempted, with malice aforethought, to murder Pastor Heller. Thought I forgot about that, didn't you!

On this prayer Sunday, our prayers go with you, wherever the hand of God leads you. Especially because the words of Jesus ring in our ears, "In the world you will have tribulation!" When the woes of life overtake us,

there is no reason for us to carry our worries, our fears, our burdens, ourselves. We can go boldly to God's throne of grace for help in our every need.

Faith looks to Christ alone. Take heart; He has overcome the world! Baptized and living in Him, we are more than conquerors over sin, death, and all the tears of earthly life. What better hymn is there for God's Church to sing on Rogate Sunday that hymn we all cherish so very much:

"What a friend we have in Jesus,  
All our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
Everything to God in prayer!  
Oh, what peace we often forfeit;  
Oh, what needless pain we bear--  
All because we do not carry  
Everything to God in prayer!"

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me (Jn 14)." And again, Jesus says, "Whatever you ask in My name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son (Jn 14)."