

6th Sunday of Easter 5/22/22
John 16:23-33 C

SERMON TEXT: WORDS OF THE APPOINTED GOSPEL FOR THIS SUNDAY, FROM THE 16TH CHAPTER OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

Today is Rogate, Prayer, Sunday. "Rogate" means "ask," and this Sunday takes its name from the words of Jesus,

"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."

It all started in the year 466 AD, when there was great distress throughout Europe as the result of earthquakes and other calamities. Bishop Claudius of Vienna decreed that the first three days before the Ascension should serve as a period of prayer and processions in the churches and on the fields to call on God to remove the sufferings of the people. Gradually, this custom came into usage in other places and, in the year 591, it was prescribed for the whole Christian church. Thus, the Sunday before Ascension Day became the special prayer Sunday of the year, and the week beginning with this Sunday became the week of prayer.

This Sunday looks forward to the Ascension, which we celebrate this Thursday, "I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father," Jesus said (v. 28). At His ascension, Jesus returned to take His place at the right hand of His Father in heaven. Having risen from the grave, destroying death and bringing life and immortality to light, He returned to the Father in heaven. This Sunday, we rejoice that even though He has ascended into heaven, He has not left us as helpless and hopeless orphans. He has not abandoned us. Jesus lived on this earth. He knows how troublesome earthly life can be. He knows how difficult it is to walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

So, God commands and invites us to pray. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petitions, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God,” St. Paul teaches us. St. Peter says it this way, “Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you” (1 Pe 5:7).

I think it’s fair to say we often think of prayer as though prayer were some sort of magic spell that we can cast on God to get Him to give Him what we want. You know -- “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. And 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, there is nothing there. There is no one or nothing to hear our prayer.

Maybe a little illustration will help. When I was a kid, my grandparents lived 65 miles away in McGregor, ND. We would send them cards and letters. We would simply address those envelopes to “Mr. & Mrs. Helmer Hermanson, RFD, McGregor, ND.” And every North Dakotan knows that “RFD” means – Rural Free Delivery. Every card, and every letter we sent to Grandpa & Grandma because that was the right address.

So, we address our prayer to the true God -- the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, because God has the power and authority to grant us our prayers.

This is what Jesus teaches us when He teaches us to pray. Jesus teaches us to pray to God, with the words, “Our Father Who art in heaven.” Literally, He teaches us to address God as “Daddy.” Our *Small Catechism* teaches us, “With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness

and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father” (p. 19).

Maybe the question for us this Rogate Sunday is “Why,” why should the Almighty God hear and grant our prayers in the way he knows best for us? 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?

Again, we Jesus answers that question for us, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He will give it to you” (v. 23). 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 3rd day, Jesus rose again from the dead, defeating our greatest enemy, death itself, and opening heaven to us.

That means, Dear Saints of God, that God’s throne of grace in heaven 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 (Ps 55:22). We cherish those words because the words of Jesus ring in our ears, "In this world you will have trouble," (Jn 16:33)! 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!"