

Rogate  
St. John 16:23-33

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

“Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”

As we are about to enter the days of Rogation, the three days before Jesus’ ascension to the right hand of the throne of God, we are given a text on prayer; appropriate to the day, Rogate, which name means “ask” or “call upon.” So, Jesus says, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.”

The text today is a continuation of what we have been hopping around in the last few weeks. In John 16, Jesus is preparing His disciples—His church—for His impending departures. Yes, that was plural. Jesus is in the midst of His passion in our text, and His death for the sins of the world is imminent. But then, so is His resurrection; likewise, His ascension. Jesus is going away, but He’s not really leaving anyone. His visible presence among man is about to cease—His ministry is about to be completed—but He will be among His people wherever two or more are gathered in His name, always, to the end of the age. (cf. Matthew 18:20; 28:20)

*Until now, says Jesus, you have asked nothing in My name; but now that His ministry is completed, He says, Ask. For now the revelation of His name is complete; therefore now His disciples may ask in His name...*  
(Burnell F. Eckardt, Jr. in Every Day Will I Bless Thee)

Therefore, Jesus comforts His church with the fact that the Father is always close. “Ask, and you will receive,” He says. “Whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.” Your pastor likes to tell you that he is always a phone call away; he doesn’t have a direct line to God in order to know when you might have need of him, and he wants to hear from you. In similar fashion, your Father in heaven desires to hear from you, but He is always near, knowing what you need and what you want and what you are facing. As much as your pastor wants to hear from you in your time of need, because he doesn’t know what you are always going through, so much more your Father in heaven desires to hear from you simply because He knows, but wants to hear you.

Furthermore, He’s as close as your fathers are or should be. “Our Father,” Jesus taught His disciples to pray. (cf. Matthew 6:9) “With these words,” we are taught, “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.” True and dear...that is how Luther describes your Father in heaven, showing you a love and desire that even true and dear earthly fathers can only desire to know for their dear children.

So, it is upon this fact that Jesus instructs His church to pray. “Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.” Jesus goes—indeed, has gone—to the Father, to His Father and your Father, but He and the Father are ever close to you. Therefore, He bids you to call upon your Father in Jesus’ name, and He will give you.

“Most assuredly, I say to you...” Jesus begins the sentence with the phrase, “Amen, Amen.” Truly, truly; verily, verily; in all truthfulness; most assuredly...in other words, you can count on it, nothing can prevent this from being the truth. Essentially, Jesus promises on oath that you can ask for anything. This is Jesus’ solemn, unwavering promise to you.

Where you have problems, however, is with the phrase “in My name.” Your problem is that you hear that phrase apart from God-given faith. This problems finds its expression, usually, in two ways.

The first is that tacking on the words “in Jesus’ name” to the end (or, if you’re feeling especially

pious, to the beginning) of a prayer makes your prayer heard by God. After all, Jesus did say to ask for anything in His name, and the Father will give. It follows, then, that in order for the Father to give, the prayer must be said in the name of Jesus. To omit those words, then, is to have your prayer not heard, ignored, by the Father.

This ignores God-given faith because to pray in Jesus' name simply means to pray in God-given faith. Your Father in heaven hears your prayers because He is your Father in Christ and you who are Baptized into Christ's death and resurrection are His dear sons. Dear earthly fathers do not respond to their dear children's requests only upon the utterance of some particular phrase; even the attempt to teach politeness—say, "please"—is a response from a father to a child's request. The request is heard on the fact that a dear child asks their dear father, on the mere basis of being that father's child! Your Father in heaven hears your prayer because, in faith in the Son of God, you are His dear son and fellow heir with Jesus Christ of eternal life!

The second common problem you may have with the phrase "in Jesus' name" is the idea that this phrase is somehow perks the ears of the Father in order to give you whatever it is you ask for. After all, Jesus did say to ask for anything in His name, and the Father will give. It's the logical conclusion; ask for anything...in Jesus' name...and the Father will give it. This is Jesus' sure and certain promise; whatever you ask for in Jesus' name, God will give it you.

This ignores God-given faith because to pray in Jesus' name simply means to pray in God-given faith. The cry of faith is not for the newest, shiniest toy, or for every single object that your sinful heart desires. The cry of faith is for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation—that God would not look upon your sinfulness and not tarry in sending the Son to claim you as part of His bride. The simple, heartfelt cry of faith includes, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus." "Lord, have mercy on me." "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief."

This does not mean that your Father does not want to hear your desires. Nor does it mean that He will never fulfill those desires. But, in His infinite wisdom, grace, and mercy, there are many times when the Father withholds these gifts from you, but He does it for your benefit. Nevertheless, your Father in heaven delights in giving you the desires of your heart, so long as doing so is to your benefit and not your detriment. (cf. Psalm 37:3-6)

Notice, however, that in those three, short prayers mentioned previously, "in Jesus' name" is completely missing. However, God-given faith is not. This faith confesses in the Creed a looking forward to the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead, and until that day, it confesses a Lord who is merciful to forgive and sanctify in the true, Christian faith, just as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

The cry of faith asks the Father for those things that the Father gives without hesitation. For God loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have everlasting life. (cf. John 3:16) The Father gave His Son over to death for you that you would have life everlasting in His name, having been baptized into that most excellent name. And the Father hears your prayer for His name's sake.

This, then, is what the cry of faith always asks for, even in those times when you are unable or unwilling to utter the words of a prayer, as the Spirit groans in intercession on your behalf (cf. Romans 8:26), whether or not you speak the words "in Jesus' name." The Son has gone to the cross, and there has given His life as your ransom; the faith that God has given you looks to His sacrifice for your strength in every need, even as it looks forward to the fulfillment of what Jesus won for you there—life everlasting. Your praying to the Father as your heavenly Father comes to you by way of your baptism into Jesus' death and resurrection. Burnell F. Eckhardt wrote,

[N]ow also Baptism in His name takes on its full significance, as the meaning of his name comes into full view. This is the week of *Rogate*,

that is, of calling upon God.... Therefore this is a week for pondering the baptismal origin of prayer, for to call upon God's name is to claim the privileges which Baptism *in* God's name has granted. When you pray, therefore, pray *in Jesus' name*, that is, with the claim of being His own possession, having been baptized in that name, that excellent name whose full expression is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. And know that this triune God must hear *you*, for *His* name's sake. *Ask*, He says, *and you will receive*, because faith not only knows what to ask, but how, since faith itself comes from this triune God and His name which is given in Baptism. (Burnell F. Eckardt, Jr. in *Every Day Will I Bless Thee*)

And it is Jesus' death and resurrection, then, which provides for you unfettered and unveiled access to the Father, which you can take boldly, as the author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote:

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. (Hebrews 10:19-23)

It is by Jesus' death and resurrection that you hold fast the confession of your hope without wavering. Jesus promised, and He is faithful to keep His promises. Your Father hears your prayers, because you pray with faith in the Son of God, with whom you have been crucified, who loved you and gave himself for you, and forgiven you for all of your sins. "Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you."

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.