

Rogate
St. John 16:23-33

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

These “flashbacks” in John 16 have been happening for the last three weeks, today included. At this point in St. John’s Gospel, it’s the day of Jesus’ betrayal into the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes; He celebrated His last supper with His disciples back in chapter 13, and in chapter 18 Judas brings the Temple guard to arrest Him. Between these two events, Jesus is preparing His disciples for the time that He will no longer be with them and His church as He had in the three or so years since His baptism. While He will soon be taken from them to be crucified and die for their sins and the sins of the world and on the third day rise again—events which on a few occasions He had told them would happen—there’s something different about these sayings of Jesus, about His telling the disciples that He is going away.

“A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.” (John 16:16) “It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.” (John 16:7) “He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.” (John 16:14) “Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you. And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” (John 16:22ff)

Looking back at what Jesus had done, the something different He is referring to is His ascension: Jesus, in a little while, will go to the Father, not to be seen again until He comes to judge the quick and the dead. Until that great and dreadful day, He will have sent—He does send and continues to send—the Helper, the Holy Spirit, to take from what is of Jesus—what is Jesus—and give it to His people, His church. So, the Church has lived these last two millennia on Jesus Christ as the Holy Spirit has revealed and given Him to Her in the Word and Sacraments.

And in these latter days, these last two millennia, the Church has asked of Her Head in prayer that which He has commanded Her to do—in His name—a fact that is observed and commemorated on this day, Rogate, the Sunday before the three Minor Days of Rogation, the three days before the celebration of His Ascension to the right hand of the throne of God. Every Sunday that has a special name, as today, usually gets that name from the first line of the Introit or Psalm for the day, except for Rogate. Today is slightly different as the name is taken from the Latin word for “to ask” or “to call upon,” due to what Jesus tells His church in today’s Gospel: “Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” Today, in a way, is celebrated the gift of prayer.

Now, what do the Scriptures say about prayer? A favorite verse regarding prayer is usually taken from the letter of St. James: “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” (James 5:16) Something to learn from this passage in light of what Jesus said in today’s Gospel is that prayer is closely connected to Baptism. The righteous man, the man made righteous by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, prays in the name of Jesus, and His prayer is heard—it avails much. The prayer of an unrighteous man—he that rejects God and His grace—does not avail; it is not heard.

Dear hearers, by that, it should be evident that this is so much more than merely sticking “...in Jesus’ name” on the end of your prayers, or as is normally heard at the end of the collects, “...through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost....” These aren’t some magic phrases that turn God on to your prayers in order to make them effective and fervent. On the contrary, praying in Jesus’ name is an acknowledgment that you have no merit or worthiness on your part to approach God. It is to acknowledge that you are worthy to approach God in prayer **only** for

the sake of Jesus and His merits. Why? Because in the waters of Holy Baptism, you have put on Christ and His merits are yours!

There, in that sacred flood, you have been made righteous. It is an alien righteousness that you possess, for it is given to you. It is from outside of yourself—*extra nos*—and nothing of your doing. The merits by which you may approach God in prayer are not yours by your works and efforts and worthiness—in and of yourself you are completely unworthy—but are yours by way of the atonement won for you by Jesus on the cross. There, in the font, you have been claimed by God as His dear son, and only because of that may you approach God as a son approaches his dear father.

Rev. Burnell Eckardt put it this way:

...[T]o 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 express is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. And know that this triune God must hear *you*, for *His* name's sake. (*Every Day Will I Bless Thee*, p. 223)

You pray in Jesus' name because you belong to Him. You were bought with a price—not gold or silver, but Jesus' holy, precious blood, and His innocent suffering and death. His death for sin is your death to sin by way of baptism into His death, and His resurrection to life is your resurrection to life everlasting by way of baptism into His resurrection. "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Galatians 3:26-27)

Therefore, when you pray in Jesus' name, you are praying to God as your true Father, with all confidence asking Him anything as dear children ask their dear fathers. Rev. Dr. Carl Fickenscher once said, "...the Sacraments give us what the cross earned;" one of those things is the right as sons to ask the Father, and He will answer: "In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God." You only love Jesus and believe that He came forth from God because you have been given faith to believe and trust in Him by way of Word and Sacraments, specifically the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.

However, it follows that praying in Jesus' name is not a device to ask for anything you want and expect that you will get it. Yes, ask your Father in heaven as dear children for your hearts' desires—this is good and salutary and commended by the Scriptures:

- "LORD, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will prepare their heart; You will cause Your ear to hear..." (cf. Psalm 10:17)
- Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass. (Psalm 37:4-5)

However, be prepared to receive a "No" or "Not yet" reply from Him. The difficult part to understand in this is that you should rejoice in the answer you receive from the Father, whether that is "Yes," "No," or "Not now." "I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." You will receive, Jesus said, but what you receive will not necessarily be exactly that for which you asked; however, rejoice, because God the Father has answered your prayer for your good and you have received from Him exactly what you need! And in that, your joy will be full!

If, in His will, you need what you desire, God will grant it, for Jesus' sake. If it serves you better not to have what you desire, or to have it another time, then God will withhold your request, for Jesus' sake. Again, this goes back to Holy Baptism, wherein you were given forgiveness, life, and salvation and faith to receive these blessings. That for which you ask in Jesus' name that serve these ends will always receive a "Yes" from your Father in heaven, for Jesus' sake, because praying in Jesus' name, as mentioned before (and bears repeating) is an acknowledgment that you have no merit in and of yourself to approach God the Father in prayer.

Prayer in Jesus' name requires faith and trust in Jesus and His death for your forgiveness, life, and salvation. Faith and trust ask of the Father in Jesus' name first and foremost what He has already promised you. Forgiveness, life, and salvation are what the heart saved by the Lord earnestly desires—what it asks for in Jesus' name. Again, Rev. Eckardt writes, "*Ask, [Jesus] says, and you will receive, because faith not only knows what to ask, but how, since faith itself comes from the triune God and his name which is given in Baptism.*" In other words, faith knows for what to ask, and these are forgiveness, life, and salvation—the very things the Father has already promised you for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Now, Jesus gives you the gift of prayer because He has returned to the Father. He said, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." The world hated and still hates Jesus, a fact which is seemingly more overt now than it has been since He walked the earth and a few centuries after. Consequently, the world will hate and does hate those who are His. The world hates you. At times you will feel overwhelmed and outnumbered—you will feel lonely—because the world hates you.

It is quite tempting in those times to neglect prayer and the Word and the Sacraments and the fellowship of the saints. As Jesus said of the disciples before His seizure and crucifixion, "Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone." When it feels like the world is closing in all around you, you so easily forget of Jesus and His promises—and you feel more and more alone. Like the disciples, you scatter; you scattering in an attempt to find a fleeting moment of peace and solace. And then you begin to wonder, "Did God abandon me? Did God forsake me?" You run away from God (or try to), and then wonder if **He left you**. No, dear hearers, He forsook His Son, Jesus Christ, for you, and for His sake, gave you the benefits of His life, death, and resurrection.

So, you are not alone, for God in Christ is with you, even in those times when you feel lonely, and especially when you gather with others whom He has claimed: "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:19-20) You, two or three or many more, gather in His name because He has placed His name upon you in Holy Baptism, and Jesus is there, especially in Word and Sacrament. What a great gift that when you gather, you, together, have the privilege to ask anything of God. And this is of great comfort, because, even though the world hated and hates Him, He has overcome the world, and He has overcome the world for you!

Finally, like Holy Baptism, prayer finds its consummation when Jesus returns. All of those things which the faithful and trusting heart desires—that which is the content of the effective, fervent prayer of the righteous man—which are summed up in forgiveness, life, and salvation—are fulfilled when Jesus returns and grants the finality of those things to those who have been baptized and believed (cf. Mark 16:16) For throughout the ages, the fervent prayer of the Church has always been, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus." In times of peace and especially in times of persecution, the faithful have always asked for the return of Jesus, even as the martyrs under the altar in heaven wonder how long Jesus will wait. (cf. Revelation 6:10) However, on that day, Jesus says, you will ask Him nothing, for everything will be clear and plain and obvious to you. Jesus will be standing among you, in the flesh, having come to judge the quick and the dead; and to you have believed on His name—the quick—the judgment is not guilty for His sake, and the sentence will be life, eternal life in His presence.

For now, however, "Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." By grace through faith, you ask in Jesus' name. And your joy in Christ is full to receive these words: You are baptized; you have put on Christ; you are His; you are forgiven for all of your sins.

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