

**The Sixth Sunday of Easter, May 26, 2019**

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## **Praying in Jesus' Name**

[John 16:23–33](#)

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

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Speaking to His disciples before His arrest, Jesus said, “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’VE ASKED NOTHING IN MY NAME. ASK AND YOU WILL RECEIVE, THAT YOUR JOY MAY BE FULL” (vv 23–24).

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Right before heading to the cross, Jesus said to His disciples, “WHATEVER YOU ASK THE FATHER IN MY NAME, HE WILL GIVE IT TO YOU” (v 23). He said again: “ASK AND YOU WILL RECEIVE” (v 24). He doesn’t say, “Ask and *maybe* He’ll give it to you” or “Ask and *maybe* you’ll receive.” Jesus guarantees it. He guarantees that the Father will give and that you will receive.

*JESUS PROMISES THAT THE DISCIPLES’ PRAYERS AND YOUR PRAYERS  
TO THE FATHER WILL BE HEARD AND ANSWERED.*

### I.

Up to this point, Jesus had been with the disciples in person, visibly. When they had a need, they asked Him directly and He brought their prayers to God. I’m reminded of the raising of Lazarus. When Jesus came to be with Mary and Martha after their brother’s death, Martha confessed her faith in Him, “EVEN NOW I KNOW THAT WHATEVER YOU ASK FROM GOD, GOD WILL GIVE YOU” (Jn 11:22). Ordering the stone to be rolled away from the tomb, Jesus shows this to be true. He prayed, “FATHER, I THANK YOU THAT YOU’VE HEARD ME. I KNEW THAT YOU ALWAYS HEAR ME, BUT I SAID THIS ON ACCOUNT OF THE PEOPLE STANDING AROUND, THAT THEY MAY BELIEVE THAT YOU SENT ME” (Jn 11:41–42). And then He called Lazarus back from death.

Jesus has a direct line to the Father. When He asks, the Father hears. Whatever He asks, the Father does. Their relationship is that close, that intimate. They have one will, even as they have one divine majesty and are one God. Jesus is the BELOVED SON, WITH WHOM the Father is WELL PLEASED (Lk 3:22). And God the Father is the FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST (Rom 15:6).

But Jesus' relationship with His disciples was about to change. That night He told them, "I CAME FROM THE FATHER AND I'VE COME INTO THE WORLD, AND NOW I'M LEAVING THE WORLD AND GOING TO THE FATHER" (v 28). And how will He go to the Father? By His ascension. When Jesus had risen from the dead, He sent Mary Magdalene with this message to the disciples: "I AM ASCENDING TO MY FATHER AND YOUR FATHER, TO MY GOD AND YOUR GOD" (Jn 20:17). More about that next Sunday!

So what will His ascension mean for the Church? Will it be a cause of sorrow for His disciples? Will they still have access to the Father? What will happen when they can't see Jesus right there next to them? When they can't call out and watch His ears turn toward them? When they can't hear His voice pray to the Father on their behalf?

## II.

"IN THAT DAY," Jesus says, "YOU WILL ASK NOTHING OF ME. TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, WHATEVER YOU ASK OF THE FATHER *IN MY NAME*, HE WILL GIVE TO YOU. UNTIL NOW, YOU'VE ASKED NOTHING *IN MY NAME*. ASK, AND YOU WILL RECEIVE, THAT YOUR JOY MAY BE FULL" (vv 23–24). The result of His death, resurrection, and ascension is this: Christians pray to the Father in Jesus' name. It's no longer a matter of asking Jesus to ask the Father. *THROUGH CHRIST*, God *RECONCILED US TO HIMSELF, NOT COUNTING OUR TRESPASSES AGAINST us* (2 Cor 5:18, 19). His Father has become *our Father*. We have the privilege and gift of praying direct, as we do in the Lord's Prayer. We have access to the Father. We have a line to heaven.

"ASK THE FATHER," Jesus says, "IN MY NAME." The Father hears our prayers because they go *through* the Son, through Jesus, through His death, resurrection, and ascension. We've been baptized into Christ Jesus, and our prayers have been baptized into Him as well. "IN THAT DAY," Jesus says, "YOU WILL KNOW THAT I AM IN MY FATHER AND YOU IN ME AND I IN YOU" (Jn 14:20). When we pray, the Father hears us as He hears His beloved Son! Our prayers ascend to Him in Jesus' name!

So why don't we pray more? Why do we doubt that our prayers are heard or that they'll be answered? Why are we timid instead of bold and confident? Why don't we call upon God's name in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks? When trouble comes, are we quick to call all sorts of people for help before praying, "Lord, have mercy"? When good comes, do we take personal credit, pat ourselves on the back, or attribute it to luck rather than saying, "God be praised"?

The devil, the world, and our sinful nature would have us believe that prayer doesn't work. That it's ineffective and uncertain. They want us to be disappointed by prayer. They want us to ask and expect nothing from God and then to just stop asking altogether. They want us to believe that there must be a problem with us and our prayers. That our sins are too great, or we're praying in the wrong way, or our faith is too weak. Or that there's a problem with God. That He can't hear us, or doesn't hear us, or isn't powerful enough to do what we ask, or isn't good, or doesn't even exist. These are lies! That's the exact opposite of what Jesus says and promises.

Now I know that our prayers often *seem* to go unheard and unanswered. I know that we don't always get exactly what we have in mind when we pray. We've all been in that boat, perhaps often.

Jesus isn't offering us a magic formula or a secret code. We can't just say the words "in Jesus' name" and get whatever we listed off right before. That's how my sinful nature wants it to work. He would use what Jesus says here to manipulate God and serve my own selfish desire and will. Jesus doesn't endorse that. His cross draws a giant "x" through all such prayers.

If prayer is like a blank check signed by Jesus, then it's good for whatever is in His account and only for what's in His account. You can't draw on what isn't there, but you can most certainly draw on whatever is there. Or if prayer is like a credit card from Jesus, then it's as good as His line of credit but only for His line of credit. His line of credit doesn't cover sinful things, frivolous or worthless things, or things that would be harmful for us. **WHATEVER IS TRUE, WHATEVER IS HONORABLE, WHATEVER IS JUST, WHATEVER IS PURE, WHATEVER IS LOVELY, WHATEVER IS COMMENDABLE, IF THERE IS ANY EXCELLENCE, IF THERE IS ANYTHING WORTHY OF PRAISE**, pray for these things (Phil 4:8). And to pray in Jesus' name is to pray like He did in Gethsemane: "FATHER, NOT MY WILL, BUT YOURS, BE DONE" (22:42).

### III.

"IN THAT DAY," Jesus says, "YOU WILL ASK IN MY NAME, AND I DON'T 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" (vv 26–27). Jesus invites us to believe—to believe in Him and in prayer offered in His name. These prayers are guaranteed by His bloody death on the cross and by His glorious resurrection from the dead. Our sins don't stand in the way of our being heard. He already paid the price for them. Now **THE FATHER HIMSELF LOVES YOU** (v 26), just as He loves His beloved Son. He hears your prayers in the same way He hears the prayers of His Son.

Jesus died and rose so that you could pray in His name. To give you the gift of prayer to the Father. Even when our prayers aren't answered in the way or at the time we desire, we believe what Jesus said. His word is true. Not just sometimes true. It's always true. We believe that the Father hears what we ask in Jesus' name. And we believe that we will receive what we ask, if not as we will, then as He wills. And if not now, then soon! We pray in hope and wait for our prayers to be answered.

So be bold in your prayers. Pray for big things. As you pray for daily bread, pray also for the Bread of Life, Jesus. As you pray for your work, pray for God to work through you in your callings at church, at home, and in the world. As you pray for forgiveness of sin, pray also for a godly character and a holy and virtuous life. As you pray for healing and good health, pray also for the resurrection of the body and the new creation. If the richest and mightiest emperor offers you, a poor beggar, whatever you desire, asking him for a bowl of oatmeal would be an insult.<sup>1</sup> God doesn't give less than what we ask for. Rather, we ask way less than He wishes to give!

So ask for the kingdom! Ask for the New Jerusalem and the wedding feast that has no end! Ask for the Holy Spirit. For THE HEAVENLY FATHER will GIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT TO THOSE WHO ASK HIM! (Lk 11:13). At the same time, don't be afraid to pray for little things. The smallest needs, cares, and concerns of daily life aren't beneath the Father. They aren't too little for Him. HE UPHOLDS THE UNIVERSE BY THE WORD OF HIS POWER (Heb 1:3) and He upholds every single atom in it! So fear and love God by using His name to seek from Him all good things for yourselves and for others.

Jesus promises that when we pray in his name, the father in heaven hears and will answer. Take Him at His word. "ASK THE FATHER IN MY NAME," Jesus says. "ASK AND YOU WILL RECEIVE, THAT YOUR JOY MAY BE FULL" (vv 23, 24). He gave His life so that we could have this gift of prayer!

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

*Phil 4:7*

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<sup>1</sup> This example comes from Martin Luther: "It's like a time when the richest and most mighty emperor would tell a poor beggar to ask whatever he might desire. The emperor was ready to give great royal presents. But the fool would only beg for a dish of gruel. That man would rightly be considered a rogue and a scoundrel, who treated the command of his Imperial Majesty like a joke and a game and was not worthy of coming into his presence. In the same way, it is a great shame and dishonor to God if we—to whom He offers and pledges so many inexpressible treasures—despise the treasures or do not have the confidence to receive them, but hardly dare to pray for a piece of bread" (*Large Catechism* III, 57–58). See also the account of Ahaz in Isaiah 7.