

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

[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 have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”

This Sunday of the Church Year, Jesus is talking about prayer and specifically as you pray in this life as his people. So, what does this all mean? How does this inform you about prayer, invite you pray, and give you those promises which you cling to in your God given faith as you pray?

Prayer is something that rests solely and completely upon Christ and his work for you. Jesus is teaching you that today and it can't be stressed enough. He is teaching you what it means to pray to God and invites you to do so. This is a gracious invitation to hear and answer your prayers out of his mercy toward you in what he has accomplished by his obedient life, his atoning death, and his resurrection for your justification.

In this way, then, you see prayer rightly only through the lens of Jesus. To pray in Jesus's name is to pray in the death and resurrection of Jesus. It's to pray through the blood of the atonement which has satisfied God's wrath against you and reconciled you to the Father. It's no wonder that right after the Gospel reading ends today with Jesus saying what he does about peace because peace is a word of forgiveness and a word connected with this death of Christ for you on the cross. Jesus said in John 16:33, “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

Knowing this about prayer, you look at what this means to pray. God commands you to pray. Prayer is not optional for Christians. All over the Scriptures God gives this command. Sadly, it must be taught that God commands you to pray. Your old Adam doesn't want to pray, he wants to live a life that doesn't see a need to depend on someone outside of yourself. This is something of a pandemic in the church too. Even among those who are baptized prayer is not practiced daily or just simply at meals. God commands you, though, to “pray without ceasing” among other commands to pray and Jesus, in the Gospels speaks of prayer as “when you pray” to show that this is something his people.

Lest you also forget, unbelief hates prayer too. It's easy to want to think that what you have, what you do, is all because of yourself and what you determine. Your old Adam also wants prayer to be the way you think we are righteous before God. This is one of the most common things pastors hear when they confront people in sin. “I pray” is the creed of the old man when he wants to think he doesn't need to hear the word of God and receive the sacraments. The glorious confession “I pray” gets perverted into the vile confession of “I don't need Jesus because I am in the driver's seat in terms of my standing with God. I pray.”

To pray for others and even those who persecute you as Jesus commands is a humbling thing as well for it shows you that your Lord is the one who alone is God, and he alone is the one who came down from heaven to atone for the sin of the world. Refusing to pray or neglecting prayer in your lives too is a deadly thing. Despising God's commandments is sinful, and God threatens to punish those who break his commandments. Not praying or treating prayer lightly breaks the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment where God commands you not to misuse his name. The Lord's name is, instead, to be called upon in every trouble as you pray, give him praise, and thanks.

So, why do you pray? First it is because God has commanded you to pray. The second part of “why do pray” is because God has promised to hear you and this really is vivid in the Gospel reading, “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 have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”

God promises you that he hears your prayers and answers them. As Christians, even with promises that like that, you can forget those promises of God when turn prayer into manipulating the name of God rather than calling upon the name of God. It's tempting to think if enough people pray for you or we pray hard enough you can really get God to hear and answer you. This is often what prayer gets turned into when you hear phrases like the "power of prayer." Prayer, though, is never a power. Prayer is speaking to God as children who are talking to their dear Father.

Another thing happens too when the devil puts into our minds the doubt that God will answer your prayers or that somehow you need to earn what you are ask for in praying to God. The devil likes you to think "God will answer my prayer if I do this or don't do that." Prayer is taken out of the hands of Christ and placed into your own. Your sin gets rubbed in your face or you question God's promises rather than believing as we right confess in the Small Catechism about the Fifth Petition "And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," What does this mean? "We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us." On the flip side you caveat them to make your will be the determining factor for the answer to prayer rather than the instruction of Jesus to pray, "thy will be done."

Listen again to those words of Jesus today. "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 have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not 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. I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father."

Dear people of God, Jesus has gone to the Father, and you have peace with God. What this means is even as God does command you to pray there is something so wonderful and so sweet that goes along with this as you see Jesus crucified and risen for you. Prayer is so much more comforting than what the devil, the fallen world, and your sinful flesh pervert it into. God promises to hear and answer your prayers. Think about that for a minute. You have God's ear because of what Jesus has done for you and who he has made you to be in the waters of your baptism. You can't but pray in the name of Jesus because baptized into Christ your life is hidden in him and you bear his saving name.

The very nature of prayer looks outside of yourself and sees that you need one to help you, deliver you, and or in the case of thanksgiving, you have been given what you needed or wanted only out of Fatherly divine goodness and mercy. God is indeed your Father because you belong to and are in the Son. This Son is the beloved Son of God who has covered you with his righteous and intercedes for you at the right hand of God. When you think about how vast the world is and how many Christians are praying every single minute of every single day. God hears and answers each prayer, and this goes for you too.

Even those prayers of "Lord, help me, or Lord, have mercy, or thank you Lord" all of those are prayed in the name of Jesus and every single one of those prayers the Lord and answers you for the sake of Jesus who has died for you. There is no prayer which is too small or too great. All these prayers you pray to God are heard and answered by your loving Father. You are free to pray because you belong to Jesus, and he has set you free. The confidence to pray, then, is the confidence of knowing that Jesus has died for you and it's the confidence of your baptism where the Lord placed his saving name of you, forgave your sin, rescued you from death and the devil, and gave you eternal salvation as the words and promises of God declare. That's why often the sign of the cross

is made at the beginning of prayers because it reminds you who you are and what God has given you in your baptism and how you approach God as one redeemed by Christ, the crucified.

Now, there will be those times when you see what the answer to your prayer is in this life. Sometimes it might not be right away, but it may be a while. A famous example of this in church history is St. Monica, the mother of St. Augustine, in her struggle praying for her husband and her son. She is often held up as a model of persistent prayer. In the Bible, one example is given of the persistent widow. Monica, Augustine's mother, was treated terribly by her husband in many ways, but she kept praying for his conversion. Not long before his death she saw the answer to her prayer as he repented of his many sins and was baptized and then died as a Christian. For her son, Augustine, she prayed for years and years and finally the day came when he too was converted by the Holy Spirit, she saw him baptized, and eventually Augustine became a priest/pastor, then a bishop and doctor/teacher of the church. Her prayers looked to the promises of God who alone can change hearts even very stubborn ones who sinned greatly against her personal and give new and eternal life.

Examples like Monica and her family abound but there are times when these don't appear, at least, to happen. That doesn't mean for one instant that God has stopped hearing and answering your prayers. In your life there may be prayers you are still praying that don't seem to be answered yet or the devil is trying to get you to doubt God and think they are falling on deaf ears. But you see it's precisely in these times like this that the Lord places before you these promises like he does in the reading today, "Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." So, as you pray, you cling to words and in doing this you fix your eyes on Jesus and see that joy that only he can give for he is crucified for you and is risen from the dead. He is the God who hears and promises to answer your prayers and he is the God who is risen from the dead and will raise you from your graves too.

The boldness of prayer is the boldness of trusting the promises of God even when the answer to your prayer might be "no." You look to God who alone is good, righteousness, and knows what you need even before you ask him. Everything rests in him who has created, redeemed, and sanctified you to be his own dear children. As you pray in this way and in this faith the Lord sustains you and strengthens you through his word and sacraments fixing your eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of your faith and the one who gives you peace and has overcome the world.

What wonderful words of Jesus to hear this morning as you see who you are in Christ. Even though he tells the disciples they will be scattered and leave him alone, Jesus will not be alone for he is with the Father. And for you this means that you stand before the throne of God as one who is in Christ, hidden in him, and clothed with him. In this world, then you have peace because Jesus is the one who overcame the world. Prayer realizes this and lives in it because you know you have deliverance from the tribulations of world and look forward to the life to come. When you pray to God you are praying as his children. You are praying as those who bear the name of the Holy Trinity and made clean by the blood of Christ.

When you pray there is great confidence and boldness in your prayer. To pray the Lord's Prayer and call God, "Our Father" to call him, your Father is nothing insignificant. And not everyone can call God their Father. Only those who are in Christ can pray the Lord's Prayer rightly and with confidence. That's you. You are in Christ, and you have the boldness to pray "Our Father" and it's a wonderful thing before God. It's sweet incense before his throne because your prayers are carried through Christ crucified, the one in whom the Father is well pleased. When you pray, you are heard as children, dear beloved children of God. And God cares for you. Whatever is going on in your life being times of trial, trouble, suffering, thanksgiving, and/or great joy the Lord hears you. There's nothing insignificant in your life that God doesn't care for you or not listen to your prayer. A little kid thanking God for his dog and for the Lord to keep it safe is just as heard as the congregation who prays together for the whole church throughout the world. All these things are heard because all are prayed in Christ who is the mediator between God and man, the one who is your Redeemer.

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter—Rogate—May 14, 2023

Thanks be to God today, then, for the gift of prayer. Christians pray. It is the exhale of your faith. If God's word and sacraments are our "inhale" that is what you take in and gives you your very breath, you exhale prayer. You breath out in faith what God has given to you and call upon him. What a joy to have such access to the Almighty, eternal God. Yet this is what you have because Christ has been crucified for you, is risen, and ascended to the right hand of the Father. The Son of God, true God and true man, is yours and that means everything. In Christ you have it all as God commands you to pray and promises to hear you. And hear you he does now as you pray and on that final day into eternity where your faith ends, and you see him face to face just as Jesus is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.