

John 16:23-30 (Rogate)
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
May 22, 2022

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

There's a common notion that anything church related has to take place at church. We celebrate Divine Service every Lord's Day right here in God's house. At this pulpit and altar our Lord comes to us with His Word and with His Sacraments. It's a good thing we come to church to receive the blessings God has prepared for us! It's helpful to have a designated time and place to receive God's gifts. The liturgy and the liturgical year provide a rhythm for our life. The sacred space reminds us that we are called to be holy, set apart as a people for God. But we need to keep in mind that there's not a huge wall of separation between in here and out there. The separation between in here and out there is meant to be bridged. We come here to be fed by God's Word so that we can go out there and live as God's ambassadors to the world in our daily lives. We also remember that God is not just present with us on Sunday mornings between 8:30 and 9:30, or even between 8:30 and 12:30. God is present with us here in a particular way on Sunday morning so that He can also be present with us throughout the week wherever we might be.

When you look back at the history of the church, you see that the division between the sacred and the secular is a more recent development. In today's world it seems like there's a huge separation between our life as Christians and our life in the world. We compartmentalize our lives: one box for church, one box for work, one box for family, one box for friends, and on and on. Christianity has become so internalized, so much a matter of the heart, that for the rest of the week we can forget we are Christians. We can forget that who we are as Christians informs every

facet of our lives, even in outward ways. We forget that Christian practices like reading the Bible and praying are not just Sunday morning activities. The Word of God and prayer are part of our daily lives. As St. Paul wrote to St. Timothy: “everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the Word of God and prayer” (1 Tim 4:5). Everything we do in our lives, not just a few hours on Sunday morning, but everything, is to be done to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31), sanctified by the Word of God and by prayer. The Word of God and prayer are central to living a Christian life throughout the week.

Today is Rogate Sunday, which comes from the Latin verb “to ask.” So today is “Asking Sunday.” To ask God for something is to pray. Historically, Rogate Sunday was surrounded by “Rogation Days,” days of asking, days of praying to the LORD for material blessings and praying against calamity, not only at church but also in the countryside surrounding the village. Rogation Days began in 5th century France and were common well into the 19th century, when the Enlightenment distanced many people from God. At the same time, industrialization distanced many people from the land. On Rogation days, people would gather at the church and then process into the fields, woods, hills, and meadows, singing hymns, praying litanies, blessing with Scripture. Just imagine, a vested pastor walking through the muddy fields! There’s no separation between the sacred and the secular there! Everything becomes sacred, sanctified by the Word of God and by prayer. The people would pray for God’s blessing on the crops, protection from disease, and for the preservation of justice in the village. Alms were given to the poor and fellow-believers would reconcile any differences they had with each other. St. Mark’s Day, April 25th, was a set Rogation Day, along with the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday before Ascension Day, that is, the three days following Rogate Sunday. So tomorrow through

Wednesday are Rogation days, days of prayer, leading up to the celebration of our LORD's Ascension into Heaven on Thursday.

Rogate Sunday and Rogation Days teach us that the Christian life cannot really be compartmentalized; it cannot be neatly divided. What we do on Sunday morning overflows into our daily lives. The Word of God and prayer sanctify all things. This reality might be harder to grasp for those of us not as connected to the land as our ancestors were. It's harder to appreciate Rogation days if we don't process through village and fields praying over the source of our sustenance, recognizing that it is truly God who gives us all good things. But Rogate Sunday and Rogation days still teach us how to appreciate everything we have as a gift of God and to sanctify all aspects of our life with the Word of God and prayer.

Even if our context has changed, prayer has remained the same. Prayer is simply making our requests and needs known to God, casting all our anxieties on Him (Phil. 4:6), and, equally important, doing so with thanksgiving. God communicates to us in His Word, the Bible, and we communicate back to God by praying to Him. We tell the LORD our problems the way we would tell our spouse or a friend about what's going on in our life. In today's Gospel Lesson, once again in the Upper Room on the night Jesus was betrayed, our LORD prepares the disciples for His Ascension into Heaven, the removal of His visible presence from this world. Part of life after the Ascension is staying in contact with God through prayer, because by praying in the name of our ascended Lord Jesus we have direct access to the Father in Heaven. Reading the Bible and praying are how we stay connected to God throughout the week after we leave church on Sunday.

Concerning prayer, Jesus says in our Gospel Lesson: *"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.” Why do we pray? We pray because of God’s command and promise. Since the Enlightenment, many have neglected prayer as an old-fashioned or superstitious practice. Many conclude that if there is a God and He knows all things, then there’s no need to pray because God will do what He wants anyway. Why pray for the crops if you think it’s dumb luck where the rain falls? Why pray for healing if you think it’s just a matter of chance who gets sick and who stays healthy? Why pray for justice rather than taking it into our own hands? Unbelievers scoff at Christian prayer because they see it as useless, a waste of time, or even worse, they see prayer as a hindrance to making the world a better place. Modern technology has distanced us from our sources of life, so that many now take them for granted. Without growing or hunting our own food, we tend to forget that our sustenance comes from somewhere else. We tend to think of food as what we buy at the grocery store instead of a gift from our creator. With modern medicine, we are tempted to think our health comes from doctors and various pills. We are tempted to think of all of life as disconnected from God.

Yet God commands us to pray and promises to bless us through prayer. Everytime we pray the Lord’s Prayer, which Jesus tells us to pray, we ask God to “give us this day our daily bread.” What is daily bread? Daily bread is not just the food you eat. Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body. In the Small Catechism, Luther includes: “food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and if that’s not exhaustive enough, Luther adds “and the like.” Daily bread includes everything that supports life. Why do we ask for daily bread, knowing full well that God will give us these

things without our asking?: “God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.” Asking God for daily bread is not so much about changing His mind as it is about changing our understanding, asking the LORD to open our eyes to see that all good things ultimately come from Him. Our ways of acquiring daily bread might look different now than they used to, yet we still recognize it is God who gives us everything we need to support this body and life.

We pray because God tells us to pray and because He promises to hear our prayer and listen to our pleas for mercy. As God says in Psalm 50:15 puts it: “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.” But the command and promises connected with prayer aren’t enough unless we also have Christ’s merit and intercession. If you look closely at what Jesus tells His disciples in the Upper Room, you see how Jesus emphasizes the direct access we have to the Father “in the name of Jesus.” To pray in the name of Jesus doesn’t necessarily mean we have to end every prayer with: “in the name of Jesus, Amen.” To pray in the name of Jesus means to be united to the divine name Jesus shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit. In Matthew 28, Jesus tells the disciples: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” In Baptism, we are given a new name, the name of God. In Baptism, the death and resurrection of Jesus become our death and resurrection, uniting us to Christ, and thus also uniting us with the Father and the Holy Spirit. We are reconciled to the Father, and we are given the Holy Spirit along with all the gifts He has for us. To pray “in the name of Jesus” means to pray as one redeemed by the blood of Christ and baptized into the name of the Holy Trinity.

In Holy Baptism we are united to the Son of God, and so we, too, become God's children. As Paul says in Galatians 3[:26-27], "for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." We don't need Jesus to run messages between us and the Father; because we are in Christ, we can go directly to the Father. In Baptism God becomes our Father too, so that with all boldness and confidence we can ask Him anything, as dear children ask their dear Father. In the name of Jesus we can ask the Father for anything. We can ask God to bless the crops, or at least the food set before us. We can pray that God protect us from misery and misfortune. We can pray for safety in all situations and for the health and well-being of those we know. If we ask anything according to God's will, then He hears us, even as we pray: "thy will be done" (1 John 5:14). Baptized into Christ Jesus, we have complete and full access to the entire Holy Trinity, not only here on Sunday morning, but throughout the week and in every facet of our lives. God is present with us not only here and now, but all the time, as we go out into the world and bridge the divide between in here and out there, making intercession for all people (1 Tim. 2:1).