

John 16:23–33  
Rogate (Easter V)  
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.  
May 5, 2024

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

Today is Rogate Sunday, from the Latin word “rogare,” meaning “to ask for” or “to request.” Rogate Sunday is all about asking the Lord, otherwise known as prayer. In our Gospel text for today, Jesus says: “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.” Rogate Sunday is all about prayer, about asking something of God the Father in the name of Jesus Christ.

This year, we again continue a tradition that goes back to the fifth century in what is today France. In about the year A.D. 470, Bishop Mamertus of Vienne, in southern France, instituted Rogation days, special days of repentance and prayer, for the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday before Ascension Day. The people would process through the fields, lamenting their sins, praying the litany, and asking God’s special blessing upon that year’s crop. In A.D. 511, the Council of Orleans made Rogation days official practice and by the 7th century the processions had spread throughout Gaul. At the beginning of the 800s, Rogation days were officially made part of the Roman rite and practiced throughout the western church. Rogation days were standard for Christian piety in Europe until 1969, when the Roman Catholic Church removed the practice from its liturgical calendar. Now, this ancient Christian practice is making a comeback.

The focus of Rogation days is the same focus of Rogate Sunday: prayer. As we prepare to celebrate our Lord’s ascension into Heaven, we approach Him with repentant hearts and

requests. We reflect again on the command to pray and the great promises God attaches to prayer. Prayer is such a basic practice of all religions in general, and of Christianity in particular. Prayer is so common, we often forget to think through it. Prayer is so common, Christians often neglect it to their own harm. Even the most faithful of Christians often admit their laziness when it comes to prayer. They might read the Bible, come to church, say prayers before and after meals, when waking up in the morning and before going to bed at night. And yet they feel as though something is missing. Why does prayer often seem like our last resort instead of our first resort? Why do we fear praying out loud in front of other people? Why does prayer seem so difficult in coming? These are the questions of mature Christians who want to take hold of all the blessings God has prepared for them by means of prayer.

What is prayer? Maybe this seems so obvious you've never really thought about it. Prayer is simply speaking to God in words and thoughts, as we pray to the LORD with Psalm 19:14: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer." God initiates the conversation. He comes to us in His Word. That's where God speaks to you in a way you can't miss. Oftentimes Christians think they are hearing something from God, that the Lord is "putting something on their heart," as they say. This very well might be true, but whatever we think we hear from God always has to be tested according to God's Word. The Bible is the measure of all things. It is the standard for judging doctrine and life. And the Bible gives us the words to speak back to God in prayer. From the Psalms and the Lord's Prayer as direct prayers to any passage of the Scripture you meditate on, the Bible gives you the language you need to speak to your Father in Heaven. If you're not meditating on God's Word, you have nothing to pray. The words simply aren't there. So if you want to learn how to pray, first learn to meditate on God's Word. If you need help with this, take

a look in the back of your Small Catechism. There you'll find a "Simple Way to Pray," explaining the steps of prayer, from simply reading Scripture, to actually meditating on it, to praying it. Or look at the notes in your Lutheran Study Bible, where a prayer is assigned to each section of Scripture. Or pray through the Lutheran Prayer Companion. There are so many great places to start.

So why do we pray? Maybe this question also seems obvious, so you've never really thought about it. You simply pray because that's what you were taught to do. Or maybe you never learned to pray. Or you don't pray anymore because you think: "God will work it out the way He wants, so what's the point?" The reason we pray is twofold. First, because of God's Commandment. God tells us to pray, so who are we to say no? In our Gospel text this morning, Jesus says: "Ask." The verb "to ask" is here in the imperative form. It's a command. Do this! Ask! We pray because God commands us to pray. And we find similar commands throughout the Old and New Testaments. In Psalm 50:15, God says: "Call upon me in the day of trouble." Or in Luke 11: "Ask and it will be given to you. Or James 1: "Ask without doubting." God tells us to call upon Him, to make requests and ask Him for things.

But we don't just pray because God commands us to pray. We also pray because of the great promises God attaches to prayer. In fact, God commands us to pray because of the blessings He has promised. "Call upon me in the day of trouble." That's the command. Then comes the promise: "I will rescue you, and you will honor me." "Ask . . . and it will be given to you." The command is followed by the promise. In our Gospel text this morning, Jesus says: "Ask . . . and you will receive, that your joy may be full." God tells us to come to Him in prayer that we might receive good things from Him and be filled with joy. We pray because of the command and the promise.

So if God commands you to pray and promises blessings through prayer, then why don't you always get the things you ask for? Whether it's stated or not, this is a reason so many people stop praying. They don't see immediate, tangible results from their prayers. They look at prayer in a selfish way, that it's all about getting what I want. And if God isn't getting me what I want, then why should I bother praying for anything? People who view prayer in this way certainly make their requests known. But the problem is that they are not praying in the name of Jesus. Jesus says: "Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father *in my name*, He will give it to you."

What does it mean to ask something in the name of Jesus? Our Lord's name is not a magical formula. It's not an incantation we can add to our prayers to really make sure they're heard, like name dropping so you can get something you want. The name of Jesus must always be connected with Baptism and being made a child of God. You are baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You are given the name that is above every name, the name of Jesus, at which every knee shall bow in Heaven and on earth and under the earth. To pray in the name of Jesus is to pray with Jesus as your mediator, as the one who stands between you and God the Father. Jesus is both God and man. He stands as the only bridge between humanity and divinity. And in His death He reconciled you to God and God to you. The broken relationship has been restored in the death and resurrection of Jesus. And in Jesus, you now have direct access to the Father. You can call upon Him as dear children call upon their dear Father. Always keep in mind that the name of Jesus is not an incantation or just some throw away line you add to the end of your prayers. The name of Jesus is the name that makes you a child of God. In that name, you have constant and direct access to God.

So what about the specific requests we make? Sometimes God says “yes” to the things you want. Sometimes He says “no.” And sometimes He says “not yet.” Those are the same possibilities you have in any earthly relationship. A child can ask for anything in the world. Sometimes the answer will be yes, sometimes no, and sometimes not yet. A wise parent knows what the child is ready for. Baptized into the name of Jesus, we approach our heavenly Father as children approach their earthly Father. We recognize that in His wisdom, God might say “no” to what we ask. Or He might say “not yet,” or even “yes, of course!” The main thing is that we ask in full assurance that God hears us and responds to our prayers in His time. We pray as our Lord Jesus Christ prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane: “Not my will, but you will be done.” Or as Jesus teaches us to pray daily in the Lord’s Prayer: “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.”

When a Christian prays in this spirit, He will also begin to pray not so much for his immediate desires, but for the higher things of God: for the strengthening of faith, for love, diligence, and zeal for good works. A Christian will pray for forgiveness, for support in the battle against flesh and blood and against the evil desires that still reside within him. The Christian learns to pray for preservation in the faith, for the power of the Holy Spirit, and for everlasting life, for himself and others. In prayer, a Christian seeks above all the Kingdom of God and the righteousness of God, knowing that the Lord will also provide for temporal needs. We don’t stop praying for daily bread, but we also recognize that God has so much more in store for us.

A Christian praying in the name of Jesus also then prays after the example of the same Jesus, our High Priest and great intercessor. As Jesus offers up prayers continually to the Father not for Himself, but for us His brothers, so do we intercede in prayer before God for our families, our church, our friends and neighbors, our government and community, and all those in need.

The weekly Prayer of the Church is an example of this. We also see beautiful examples of this intercessory prayer in the saints of the Old Testament, such as Abraham and Moses, and in the New Testament, such as the Canaanite woman interceding for her daughter or the centurion interceding for his servant, both of whom received that rare commendation, “Great is your faith.”

For the next three days leading up to Ascension, we’ll have Rogation day processions at different homes. We’ll walk through the fields and woods, repenting of our sins and making our requests known to God. We will pray for the fruits of the earth, as we set apart all things by the Word of God and prayer (1 Tim 4:4–5). We will pray for our congregation and for our church body. We will pray for peace and for those in authority over us. We will pray for forgiveness, life, and salvation. We will pray to the Father in the name of Jesus, knowing that in Him, all the promises of God are answered: “Yes.” Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! We stand for the Offertory.