

**ROGATE / THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**

Text: St. John 16:23-33

CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA!

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Prayer is a wonderful gift from God, our FATHER. In prayer, we communicate back to our FATHER in Heaven, that which He has revealed to us through His holy Word and blessed Sacraments—the means of God’s grace. Prayer is an unequalled opportunity for the people of God to offer up to Him thanksgiving and praise for all that He has accomplished for us through the all-availing sacrifice of His SON, JESUS. Prayer is as much a part of our Christian life as the air we breathe; it is the heartbeat of our faith. In prayer, we speak to our FATHER in Heaven as His own dear children, for St. Paul has written, *“You received the SPIRIT of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, FATHER.’”*

Sadly, this wonderful gift of God is often misunderstood and misused today. So often we treat prayer as some sort of magic incantation which we speak in some mystical way to a god who is more akin to a genie in a lamp than the God of Heaven and Earth. Yes, JESUS does say, *“...whatever you ask the FATHER in My Name He will give you.”* Yet, this does not mean that we can ask for just anything we want or desire as long as we attach the Name of JESUS to our prayer. That is sin an abuse of this gracious gift from heaven.

Still, walk into nearly any Christian bookstore and one will find shelf after shelf of supposedly Christian titles that mislead Christians to do just that: to treat our heavenly FATHER as though He is a spiritual vending machine whose sole purpose is to fill you up on the spiritual fluff and the junk food of this temporal life, or to attempt to use our God for our own sinful and selfish purposes.

Of such is the so-called *“Name-it, claim-it”* form of prayer. This is the idea that if you pray for something by name and claim it as your own and truly believe, God will give it to you. Be it a better paying job, healing from illness or injury, a new car, a new home—you name it, you claim it. If you pray hard enough and long enough and truly believe enough, you will receive whatever you pray for from God. He cannot deny you.

And if you do not receive it? Well then, maybe you just did not pray hard enough or long enough; maybe you have weak faith and did not believe enough. After all, JESUS said that all you need is faith the size of a mustard seed to move mountains.

You may remember that at the turn of the millennium we witnessed this *“Name-it, claim-it”* variety of prayer quickly become popular among so-called Evangelical Christians in the *“Prayer of Jabez”* craze. This heresy was founded on a single verse found in the First Book of

Chronicles, which one was to pray word for word every day for a month like some kind of mantra. Then, as the promise goes, one would see the power of God released in one's life.

But this understanding of prayer pits our will against the will of God. Prayer in the Name of JESUS is not simply a blank check to fulfill worldly dreams and selfish desires. JESUS taught us in the LORD's Prayer to ask for the *will of the FATHER* to be done among us. But how often do we try to bend God's will to ours instead of asking Him to conform our will to His will? Why do we pray so hard in the attempt to get the FATHER to make our plans His plan, to make *our plans* come to fulfillment, rather than seeking our place in the fulfillment of His plan of salvation? This understanding of prayer is not Christian prayer.

But if this is not Christian prayer, what is?

Well, as I said, JESUS Himself, teaches us to pray in the LORD's Prayer. JESUS teaches us that we are to pray for God's Name to be hallowed among us. As children of God through the waters of Baptism, we come to Him as little children come to their earthly father with the firm belief that He loves and cares for us and, therefore, will hear our prayers and provide for all our earthly needs. In response, we, with the help of God, strive to lead holy lives in accordance with His Word as we learn it in all truth and purity. In praying that God's Name be hallowed among us, we ask that He preserve and protect us from living lives contrary to His Word.

We pray that God's kingdom of grace in CHRIST will flourish among us and throughout the world. We pray to God that He would send His Kingdom to those who are not yet in it and that it may come by daily growth, both here and in eternal life, for those who have attained it. We implore God that His Kingdom would prevail among us through the Word and power of the HOLY SPIRIT, that the kingdom of the devil would be overthrown, and that the wicked foe would have no power over us or the world.

We ask the FATHER that His good and perfect will is done among us, that every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, be broken and hindered by Him, and that our will is shaped to His will. We ask that He destroy all things among us that would not allow us to hallow His Name or let His Kingdom come. We ask that He would do this by keeping us in His Word and faith until we die.

By praying that the FATHER's Name is hallowed and His Kingdom established among us so that we are guided by His will, we are rightly prepared to pray for our daily bread, the forgiveness of sin, protection from temptations in this world, and delivery from death and Satan.

Such prayer is the distinguishing mark between Christian prayer and all other prayer, for not all prayer is Christian or God-pleasing. St. Paul tells us today in our Epistle that there is only one way to truly come to the FATHER: through JESUS alone, by faith in Him alone. Any other way only leads down spiritual dead-ends. *"For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man CHRIST JESUS, who gave Himself a ransom for all."*

JESUS is the only way to gain access to the FATHER. Only He was able to break through the barrier of sin that we erected, cutting us off from God. By coming down from heaven and taking on our flesh, JESUS reunited God and man in Himself. And by His sin-destroying death, resurrection, and ascension He has now cleared the way for us to come to the throne of heaven.

Therefore, to pray in JESUS' Name means to pray with faith in Him as our only Mediator; as our only access to the FATHER. To pray in JESUS' Name means to pray with faith in what He has done to save you, to know that it is only because of His merits that you can come before the heavenly throne with your petitions and prayers. To pray in the Name of JESUS means admitting that there is no merit within you that brings your supplications before the throne of God.

To pray in the Name of JESUS means believing that as the bronze serpent was lifted up by Moses in the desert, so too, JESUS was lifted up on the Cross of Calvary, that all who look upon Him in faith may be saved from the venom of sin and be restored to fellowship with the FATHER.

Prayer in JESUS' Name, then, is prayer that begins with JESUS and His coming to us—not only in His ministry 2000 years ago, but also as He comes to us now through His Word and Sacraments. CHRIST is still the Mediator between us and the FATHER. Christian prayer begins with listening to the Gospel of CHRIST, listening to the words of the Scriptures as they are read and proclaimed, and then, based on that Word, speaking back to Him in faith, making requests based on what He has said and promised, praising Him for what He has done.

In this way our prayer takes on the Trinitarian shape of true Christian prayer: The FATHER speaks His Word to us through His SON by the HOLY SPIRIT. In prayer, we speak by the HOLY SPIRIT through the SON to the FATHER. First, the FATHER comes to us through CHRIST with His Word of life; and then, having been filled with His life, we are enabled through faith in CHRIST to pray to the FATHER and bring our needs and requests before Him. True Christian prayer is based not on the poverty of our hearts, but on the richness of God's Word.

This is our response, then, to those espousing a “name-it, claim-it” theology and prayer life. Godly prayer is shaped by God's Word. Prayer in JESUS' Name is prayer that proceeds from faith in Him. And faith never prays *“My will be done,”* but, *“Thy will be done.”* Faith trusts that God's will in Jesus is good and gracious, for the Name *“JESUS,”* literally means, *“The LORD saves.”* When we pray in JESUS' Name, we are asking the FATHER for all of the saving gifts that have been put into that Name which is above every name. All of this and more is the meaning of JESUS' words, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the FATHER in My Name He will give you.”*

So, we come now to CHRIST's altar, to receive there the benefits of His prayer for us. For in the lowly elements of bread and wine are found the true Body and Blood of JESUS, the very Body and Blood JESUS poured out in death for us that we are saved. This is the answer to all our prayers. For God has heard us. The Cross of JESUS CHRIST and His broken Body are His answer; His Blood shed there is His answer to all our supplications. To this, we can only respond, amen, amen; yes, yes, let it be so.

In this Church, at this altar, we seek peace in JESUS' holy and gracious absolution, praying to Him for mercy in His precious Name, knowing that we have received it when we hear Him say, *"I forgive you all your sins."*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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Rev. Raymond D. Parent II  
Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Crestview, Florida  
5/5/24 A✠D