

The Sixth Sunday of Easter

St. John 16:23-30: "Through Christ We Have Access in One Spirit to the Father."

May 5/6, 2018 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

### In Nomine Iesu

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Lord Jesus, give us the light and power of Your Holy Spirit, so that we can pray in Your name and taste Your joy. Lead us to Your death, to Your cross, so that our pride and unbelief may die, and Your love rule in us. You have loved us just as the Father loved You! What a statement this is: "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you!" Indescribable grace, but still we do not believe! Help us to believe, and teach us to pray. Pour out Your love in our heart by Your Holy Spirit, that we may keep Your command and remain in Your love. Amen. (Laache, *Book of Family Prayer*, p. 346)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

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*The sermon text for today is taken from the sixteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:*

[Jesus said:] "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." / His disciples said, "Ah, now You are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! Now we know that You know all things and do not need anyone to question You; this is why we believe that You came from God." <sup>(ESV)</sup>

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*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)*

In Christ Jesus, who opened the way "to the Father's high throne, / Where [we] may approach Him, in [His] name alone" (ELH 182, v. 8), dear fellow redeemed:

Many people can give examples of times when they were the best qualified for a job and had the most experience, but someone else was hired instead of them. It wasn't because of anything they did wrong or because they missed a window of opportunity. It was because of factors beyond their control. Maybe one of the applicants knew the boss personally, or another employee put in a good word for them. As the saying goes, "It's not what you know; it's who you know."

This saying also accurately expresses the reason we have access to God the Father. It is not our own knowledge or worthiness or hard work that gets us this access. On our own we could never reach Him or even come close to Him. We have access through God's Son, Jesus the Christ, whose name we confess by the power of God the Holy Spirit. Because of what Jesus has done for us, we can pray to God the Father "with all boldness and confidence, as children ask

their dear father" (*Small Catechism*, Intro. to Lord's Prayer). Our heavenly Father loves to hear our prayers, and He loves to respond with the rich blessings of His grace.

## I

Jesus said in today's text, "*whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He will give it to you.*" That is quite an invitation! God will give you whatever you ask for in Jesus' name. But what does it mean to ask "in Jesus' name"? It does not mean using Jesus' name like someone might use a secret password to gain entrance somewhere. Any request "in Jesus' name" is empty if it is not accompanied by faith in what He did.

The Book of Acts tells us about some "*itinerant Jewish exorcists*" who noticed how successful the Apostle Paul was at casting out demons and performing various miracles. They thought they might have the same success if they used the method he did. Seven of them approached a demon-possessed man and ordered the evil spirit to come out of him, saying, "*I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims!*" But the demon replied, "*Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?*" Then he attacked and overpowered all of them (Ac. 19:13-16). These exorcists did not actually believe in the name they were using.

Praying to God "in Jesus' name" means trusting what Jesus did to save us. His "name" includes everything about Him. It describes His Person and work. That's how it is for any of us. People associate our name with who we are and what we do. Your name carries with it your reputation. If you are known for doing good things, people will think favorably about you when your name is mentioned. If you are known for bad things, your name will bring those things to mind.

Jesus' name is "*the name that is above every name*" (Phi. 2:9). Nobody did what He did. He perfectly kept the law of God, a feat no one had accomplished before then and no one has since. Then He offered up His perfect life as the atoning sacrifice to His Father for the sins of all. The name Jesus means, "The LORD saves," which is what He did. He saved us from eternal death by dying and rising again in our place.

On the basis of what He did, Jesus invites anyone and everyone to speak to the Father. But many do not care to do this, or they do not go about it in the right way. Those who do not care to speak with God are like the employees who are constantly griping about poor working conditions and personal problems. But when the owner of the company invites them to come and share their concerns so that he might help their situation to improve, they ignore his kind invitation and keep on griping. The unbelievers who ignore the Creator of all things are like this. He sends them many earthly blessings, and He wants to give them His spiritual gifts too. But they act like He does not even exist, and they continue in their comfortless and hopeless lives.

Others imagine they can have access to God the Father without the Son. They may speak of the Son as a good teacher and wonderful moral example, but they deny that He is true God, begotten of the Father from eternity. This includes a great many people in the world who have latched on to false religions. They may put us to shame in their moral living and their practice of prayer, but God neither recognizes it nor hears it. Jesus clearly stated His connection to the Father, "*I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going*

to the Father." Earlier, He told His disciples, "I and the Father are one" (Jn. 10:30), and "No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also" (14:6-7).

We would be found in one of these two camps of unbelievers if God the Holy Spirit had not called us out of the darkness of unbelief to the light of salvation through Christ. Without the Holy Spirit's work through the Word and Sacraments, no one would confess Jesus as Lord (1 Cor. 12:3). No one would believe that there is salvation in Him alone, by faith in His name (Ac. 4:12).

## II

Now this salvation and faith are yours, and with them, the invitation to present your needs and requests to God in heaven. St. Paul writes that "**Through Christ We Have Access in One Spirit to the Father**" (Eph. 2:18). Because Jesus blotted out your sins by His death on the cross and clothed you in His righteousness at your baptism, you are able to bring your petitions before the holy God. You can come confidently to His throne of grace to "receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, He did not teach them to pray timidly or with uncertainty. He taught them to make demands of God: "Thy kingdom come"; "Give us... our daily bread"; "Forgive us"; "Deliver us." We can be confident in prayer because our salvation is secure. We don't have to wonder if God the Father will listen to us. He loves us! He has time for us! Jesus says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.... If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (Mt. 7:7,11).

If we believed this promise of Jesus, we would "pray without ceasing" (1Th. 5:17). We would say that there was no better use of our time than to pray. But instead we put a thousand other things before it, many of which accomplish no good for ourselves or our neighbors. Or we stop praying because God did not answer our prayers the way we wanted. Maybe we prayed for sunshine and He sent rain, or we prayed for healing and the condition worsened. Or we adopt a fatalistic attitude and figure God will do what He wants whether we pray to Him or not.

But if prayer were a waste of time and unnecessary, why would God repeat the invitation so frequently? "Ask, and you will receive," says Jesus, "that your joy may be full." Think of what a privilege this is! The perfect, eternal God wants to hear what you, a sinner, have to say. Pastor U. V. Koren in a sermon for this Sunday said, "If we were invited to approach the highest authority of the land, we would regard it as an honor and try to make fitting preparations for it. How much more then we should do that when we are invited to the King of all kings, to the almighty Lord of heaven and earth!" (U. V. Koren's Works, Vol. 1: Sermons, pp. 217-218). The holy God "has commanded us so to pray and has promised to hear us" (Small Catechism, Concl. to Lord's Prayer).

But how can you know that God has heard your prayer? You speak to God; why doesn't He speak to you? But He does! You have access to God the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit. He brought you to faith in Jesus, who saved you from sin and death. So prayer proceeds through the Son, in the Spirit, to the Father—a line stretching from earth to heaven.

God's answer comes the opposite way, from heaven to you on earth. God the Father gives His grace and mercy in the Spirit. The Father sends the Holy Spirit to you through the Word and Sacraments to comfort and strengthen you. And how does the Holy Spirit administer this comfort and strength? Through the Son. The Holy Spirit brings rest to your troubled soul by bringing you Jesus. Jesus knows your pain. He knows how you struggle and worry. He has endured every temptation and trial there is to endure. He comes to help and deliver you.

When you speak to God in prayer, remember also to go to His Word where He speaks to you. This is what your soul needs: to bring your requests to God and to receive His gifts through the Word. He wants to bless you with His forgiveness and cheer you with His grace. He will not ignore your prayers. He will not overlook you. God the Father will send you His good gifts by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit through His beloved Son, your Savior.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

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