

Sermon for Rogate (Easter VI) – John 16:23-30

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Today is Rogate Sunday – Rogate is a Latin word that means “ask.” In the Gospel reading Jesus talks about asking our heavenly Father for things. The Israelites certainly knew how to ask in their own way. They grumbled. They complained. They grew tired of what God provided and asked for meat instead of manna, and the vegetables of Egypt instead of freedom. They asked for a golden calf instead of the living God. They asked for an earthly king like the other nations had instead of following the Word of the Lord.

And we're pretty good at asking for the wrong things as well. As children we asked for dessert instead of vegetables. We asked to stay up late instead of going to bed at a reasonable time. We asked for the car keys. We asked for money. We asked for just about all the things that didn't matter.

We focused on the things and not the people. God gave us earthly fathers and mothers and told us to honor them so that in them we might see a picture of our relation to the real Father. For though children always ask for the wrong things, though they take their mother's love for granted, though they dishonor their father, say hateful things to them, and fight and argue: still, the love of parents for their children remains.

And the love of an earthly father or mother is but a dim shadow of the Real Father's love. For earthly fathers and mothers are children too: they also dishonored and disobeyed their parents. They aren't perfect. They can let us down. As the Psalmist says, “When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up.” Sad to say, some fathers and mothers do forsake their children. It is a chore and a sacrifice to care for children. And when mud has been tracked into the carpet, when the mess has not been picked up, when the screaming and whining won't stop, and the hateful words have been spoken: what parent has not dreamed of running away from it all?

And how much more reason our heavenly Father had to turn away from us! He gave more than any earthly parent could ever give, and He was betrayed like no earthly parent ever could be. And yet He did not run away. He doubled down on His love and sent forth a mercy such as would make any earthly parent blush. To redeem us, to save us, to call us out of sin, to win us back from the Father of Lies, the True Father sent His only-begotten Son to suffer at our hands, bear our sins in His Body, and take our guilt and shame down to death. Though Jesus never disobeyed His heavenly Father or His earthly mother, though He did all things well, still He willingly gave Himself up to death on a cross that we might live and have access to our heavenly Father.

And now in today's Gospel Jesus says to us: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, He will give it to you ... 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.” In Jesus we now have access to the heavenly Father – the Creator of all – God Almighty. In Jesus, God loves us more deeply and tenderly than even our parents. New mothers delight in counting the fingers and toes of their children, but no earthly mother has ever counted the hairs of your head as your heavenly Father has.

So ask, my fellow redeemed. Ask your heavenly Father for anything in the Name of Jesus and you shall have it. Asking in the Name of Jesus, of course, does not mean just tacking on that phrase to the end of a prayer. Of course, you cannot say, "Dear Father in heaven please cause horrible pain and distress to my enemies, in the name of Jesus. Amen." That is not praying in Jesus' Name at all. For Jesus Name means: The Lord Saves. Praying in the Name of Jesus means praying in accord with who Jesus is and what Jesus does. Praying in the Name of Jesus is praying like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane: "not my will, but thine be done." Praying in the Name of Jesus is praying like Jesus from the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Praying in the Name of Jesus is praying to "Our Father who art in heaven..."

Ask for anything in this way and it shall be yours – for if you ask in Jesus' Name you cannot ask for the wrong things. If you pray that His will be done and not yours, then you cannot be asking for things that are selfish or cruel or hurtful to yourself and others. Ask like this and even your petty desires will be heard and answered by your heavenly Father, even your ridiculous fears will be intently listened to. The answer will be from God the Father and true and perhaps not what you expected: it will be better than you expected. For it is like young children sitting down at the dinner table, excited and thinking about new toys for birthdays, worried about monsters under the bed, and the harshness of fellow peers. The parents listen, nod, and say "Eat your dinner and drink your milk."

Not exactly the answer to their prayers that the children may have been expecting: but the best answer that there could be. The parents know that giving children every single toy they want every year will spoil them, that the monsters under the bed aren't real, and that today's enemies will be tomorrow's friends and vice versa. They know that all these things are important to their children: they do not belittle them for making such requests. But they also know their real needs: "Eat your dinner and drink your milk." They feed, clothe, house, and care for their children even without their asking for it. In fact, they are so well cared for that they can waste their energies worrying about monsters under the bed and deciding between what's better: trains or trucks?

So ask your heavenly Father, beloved. Today is Rogate Sunday: ask away. Ask Him for whatever you want: ask Him for new toys and a million dollars. Tell Him about the monsters under your bed and complain about how unfairly you are treated by your boss, friends, family, and enemies. He delights to hear it all. And He will answer your prayers. The day is coming when not just new toys and millions of dollars, but the whole world will be yours, when every fear will dissipate, when every tear will be wiped away, when every enemy will either be cast utterly away or have become closer than a brother. In the meantime, Take, eat your dinner: drink his blood and be forgiven. This is what you really need: a heavenly feast, spiritual food, the body and blood of the Son who makes His Father your Father. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠

This sermon (with only slight modification) was first preached by the Rev. H. R. Curtis who serves as pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church (Worden, IL) and Zion Lutheran Church (Edwardsville, IL).