

Sermon for Easter 6 Rogate – John 16:23-30

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

Today is the 6th Sunday of Easter. The Latin name for this Sunday is Rogate, which means “pray.” And prayer is certainly the topic of today’s Gospel. Jesus said, “In that day you will ask nothing of me. 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.”

How should we pray? What should we pray? The best prayer to pray for every Christian is the prayer that our Lord gave to us. The prayer that He prayed first and then gave for His disciples to pray: the Lord’s Prayer. It is the prayer that encompasses everything we need and therefore gives us everything we need.

It was the prayer that our Lord prayed first: “Our Father, who art in heaven.” It’s Jesus who connects Himself to us: He is the only Begotten Son of God and now He bids us to call God “Father” as well, even “Our Father.” Jesus is our brother and we are truly God’s children.

“Hallowed be Thy name.” To be clear, hallowing God’s name is not our work. We can’t make God’s name any holier than it already is. We pray that it may be kept holy among us. And, God’s name actually makes us holy. As a bride takes her husband’s name, we take God’s name and His glory upon us in Holy Baptism—we are called Christ-ians and made His children.

And as God’s children we also pray in this prayer: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” This is undoubtedly the most dangerous petition of the Our Father. Why? We are praying against our own will. What’s more, we are not praying that God would conform His will (in heaven) to our will (on earth) but that He would align our will (on earth) with His will (in heaven). To pray this petition is to invite trouble! And no one knew this better than the One who first prayed this petition of “Thy will be done.”

The model for praying “Thy will be done” is the garden of Gethsemane. Our Lord asked that the cup be removed, but it was not. Even as the Father would forsake the Son on the cross in order to be with us, so also He denied the Son’s request in the garden in order to grant our requests. The Father’s will is that all men turn and be saved, that all the world be reconciled to Him, that all creation be sanctified and returned to Him. The Father loves the Son in the Son’s laying down of His life to fulfill His will and in His taking it up again. But what was finished on the cross has not yet been completed in time.

Don’t be alarmed: Jesus Christ is still the victor over the world. He has defeated the last enemy. He is alive out of the grave to bring us to Our Father’s side. Yet the tribulation continues while God delays the last judgment, and the angels delay the destructive winds, in order to get all His children to safety.

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Remember who prayed this prayer first? Remember from whose lips these words first proceeded? Odd. Strange. Jesus said, “Forgive us *our* trespasses”? Hold that thought.

In the Old Testament book of Ezra, the title character and partial narrator tells of the return of the exiled Israelites from the land of Babylon back to their own land in Jerusalem. God has sent the Babylonians to defeat (and take as slaves) His people Israel because of their unfaithfulness to Him when they worshipped false gods. But it seemed those days were over as the priest Ezra led the exiles back to worship the One True God and usher in the age of His Christ. But, much to Ezra’s dismay, this is not what happened. In fact, God’s chosen people Israel continued to worship the Baals and other false gods of the heathen nations, the very reason that God exiled them in the first place!

But then an interesting thing happens. Ezra prays. He says to the Lord: “O my God, I am ashamed, for *our iniquities* have risen higher than our heads, and *our guilt* has mounted up to the heavens.” Ezra blushes. He is ashamed. He confesses guilt for sins. Sins he didn’t commit. The priest Ezra never bent a knee to Baal. He’d never taken one coin from the heathen nations to participate in their detestable practices. And yet, he confesses that sin as if it’s his very own. Just as Abraham was no Sodomite, yet interceded for those cities, and just as Moses never worshipped the golden calf, yet prayed that God would not destroy His people, so Ezra takes up the guilt of his people before God. “Forgive us our trespasses.”

What about us? Do we sit here today, smugly, thinking, “Yep, I’ve stayed on the straight and narrow. Others, they fall into sin. Look how hard their lives are! They brought it on themselves. Glad that’s not me!” Is that what St. Paul said? “Bear one another’s burdens, but if not, it’s cool. You’re saved by grace!” We could say that our country is going to hell and a hand basket, but not us. We’re not a part of that. Are we not citizens of this country? Have you prayed for your country and those in authority? “Forgive us our trespasses.” What about that family member who’s gotten themselves in too deep because of careless wrongdoing, or even intentional sin and will someday face bitter consequences? Do we leave them to their own devices? –Or– do we pray for them? Do we make their guilt our own before God? “Forgive us our trespasses.”

There’s somebody else who prayed these hallowed words, “Forgive us our trespasses.” Unlike us, He was completely without sin. He knew no sin. No sin was in Him. But still, Jesus took our sins, our wrongdoing, our trespasses, our guilt, our smugness, our punishment, our death, and He made them His own. On the cross, He bore them all! “For our sakes, [God] made [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

“Forgive us our trespasses.” He prayed it first, to His condemnation, that we might pray it always for our salvation. God hears your prayer because of Jesus’ death for you. “Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” Amen.

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