

Rogate, A ✕ D 2010
John 16:23-33

In the Name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

1 What if every prayer were answered “yes”? Would you be happier? Imagine that God not only heard every prayer but also answered yes, like a genie you could call upon in any time of need or want and he would be bound to do your bidding. Would you pray more often? Imagine that. All your prayers would be answered. Your prayer for money, your prayer for nicer possessions, your prayer for relief from suffering of any kind would all be answered. So why stop there? Why not pray also for power and popularity? Why not pray for your team to win the World Series, or the Superbowl, or the Triple Crown? Why not pray for God to strike your enemies with cancer? Don’t they deserve it after all? Why not pray for a more attractive wife, a more caring husband, exemplary children, and parents who will likewise do whatever you want them to do? Why not pray that God would fulfill your lustful fantasies and your selfish daydreams?

2 This is how the world treats prayer. In fact, that’s how most Christians treat prayer. They are like little children who ask for new toys and endless candy and are met with the answer: “Yes, dear. Do your homework; eat your vegetables; play with the toys you have; say your prayers.” Endless new toys make selfish, greedy children. Limitless supplies of candy rot your teeth and make you fat. Like it or not, mom—and dad—are right more often than not. If they gave you whatever you asked for, it would not make your life any easier. It would make life much, much worse. You would be self-absorbed your entire life long. You would never mature, learning to delay gratification. You would remain a child your whole life. If you only thank mom on Mother’s Day for the nice things she gives and does for you, repent. Thank her even more for the things she withholds and the way she protects you from your sinful, selfish nature.

3 God has given you earthly mothers and fathers so that in them you might have a picture, an icon, of your Heavenly Father. Just as your parents answer your requests not with whatever you want but with what is best for you, so also does your Heavenly Father answer your prayer. He answers all your prayers and gives you exactly what is in your best interest. The problem is, you don’t always know what’s in your best interest. If God answered every selfish prayer, your life would be miserable, like poor King Midas whose insatiable desire for gold turned everything around him—even those he loved—to cold, loveless gold. Repent. You don’t know what’s best. The problem with your selfish prayers is just that: they’re selfish. And yet, they’re met with the answer: “Yes, beloved. Live in repentance and faith. Enjoy the daily bread you’ve been given. Say your prayers. By faith, trust that your Heavenly Father hears and answers your prayers.”

4 Jesus promises in the Gospel reading for Rogate Sunday, “Ask Sunday,” “Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you...Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” Prayer in Jesus’ name is not a magic formula. It is not like

the Prayer of Jabez, an almost magical pattern of words that God will bless more than other formulations. Prayer in Jesus' name is not purpose-driven prayer. Prayer in Jesus' name, which the Father has promised to hear and answer is not prayer to saints like good luck charms. Prayer in Jesus' name is prayer as Jesus prayed. "Not my will, but Yours be done." "Father forgive them." "Father, into Your hands, I commit my spirit." And when you pray, say, "Our Father, who art in heaven."

5 Who's not enticed by this worldly model of prayer, though? We treat prayer flippantly, as if we're negotiating with God. Even if you're not so crass as to think of God as a genie, you're tempted to treat Him that way, calling upon Him only in times of need, neglecting also to give thanks and praise when needs are less pressing. And when you pray, are you not tempted to bargain with God? "God, if you will just...then I will...or I will never..." Repent. Prayer is not quid pro quo, you-scratch-my-back-God-and-I'll-scratch-yours. Prayer is not an occasional part of the Christian life. As St. Paul exhorts, "pray continually," prayer is the very posture of the entire Christian life.

6 Who may pray? Who may call the God of the universe "Father"? Not just anyone. He hasn't promised to hear prayers from everyone. Only His true Son may call Him Father. All others are impostors who will not bend His ear. You can call the White House, but the President will not return your phone calls. You can email the Governor, but you'll get a reply from one of his staffers. But you can be sure that when one of the President's daughters calls him, he will surely answer. So with prayer. It is not a right. And you may not presume to pray unless you are a child of God, which, by nature, you're not. By nature, you are sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, children of wrath, heirs to nothing but punishment. You could not have called upon God and expected Him to hear. Your prayers should rightfully have fallen on deaf ears. Prayer in Jesus' name, prayer which He promises the Heavenly Father hears and answers, is prayer that He alone may pray.

7 Nevertheless, what Jesus promises is the Gospel reading that anything you ask for in His name, the Father will give you. The only One who could approach God the Father, has taken your place. He has given you His inheritance, made you a son of God or a daughter of God in His place. His prayer on the cross eventually fell upon deaf ears. His was the cry of dereliction, of abandonment; His lot was being forsaken, suffering hell, crying out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" not yours. The sinless Son of God became the Chief of Sinners, became sin for you, so that you might receive the adoption as a child of God. In the waters of Holy Baptism He has given you His eternal inheritance, His claim to God the Father. He has given you His very name, in which you may ask the Father, trusting Him to hear. He has marked you with the sign of His holy cross. He hears and answers your prayers, beloved child of God.

8 To pray in the name of Jesus is to pray with filial trust in your Heavenly Father to give you what is best. He hears your prayers, however imperfect, however selfish, and answers them by giving you more than you ask for, by giving you exactly what you need. He hears your prayers for daily bread and gives you the Bread of life, as well. He hears your prayers to deliver you from temporal suffering and gives you eternal life as well. He hears your prayers for

material blessings and gives you boundless treasures in heaven. So do not hesitate to pray. Setting aside all selfishness, pray for what you need or want; pray for your neighbors and your enemies. These prayers, prayers in Jesus' name, are what your Heavenly Father has promised to grant.

9 So you have a perfect Father, your Heavenly Father. And you have a perfect mother, His one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. In this Church, you never are short on prayers. She prays to her Lord continuously. Always, at some place, members of the Church are praying for the whole Church on earth, praying for you. The sun never sets on the Church. Her prayers never cease, never even pause. And her voice sings continuously. No wonder death is a preferable alternative to departing from the company of her saints. She prays for you. And she teaches you how to pray. She gives you her liturgy, which her saints have prayed for thousands of years, and bids you join their prayers. As her beloved children, she teaches you how to pray so that you may teach your children how to pray, as they are joined into her fellowship. And she bids you eat at the table of your Heavenly Father, where the food's nourishment endures into eternity. Here, God is Your Father, as He gives you the Body and Blood of Jesus to eat and drink for the forgiveness of your sins. Your Father loves you. Your prayers are heard and answered.

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

Pastor Jeff Hemmer