

Christ is risen. Alleluia.

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

In the old church calendar, this Sunday would be called Rogate, from the Latin word “to ask.” The three-year series of texts doesn’t take up the name, but the theme of prayer is evident in our texts for today, especially the Gospel.

I suspect there were many prayers ascending to God, last weekend especially. What a horrific weekend it was around the country. Besides the all too familiar litany of shootings and deaths in places like Chicago, mass shootings “claimed at least 11 lives from coast to coast,” said one story (Emma Colton, “May 2022 has seen 33 mass shootings so far,” [foxnews.com](https://www.foxnews.com), May 16, 2022). Families have been devastated; they’re wracked with grief; they’re hurting, and likely filled with anger. We lament: these kinds of shootings happen far too often in our country.

Solutions seem to escape our political class; what they’re doing is certainly not helping. That’s understandable. They approach it as if the problem were merely one of indoctrination and, of course, the availability of guns. They just don’t get it! Let the Congress and our legislators make appropriate laws. Let our prosecutors and judges justly adjudicate them. But the real problem is demonic, and prayer is the only effective weapon against it (Mark 9:29).

Yet “thoughts and prayers” offered up on behalf of victims and their families are often received with disdain. We want action, not prayer, people say.

But Jesus is not so dismissive of prayer. Oh, surely He understands our weakness. “*The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak,*” He told the disciples as He encouraged them to “*watch and pray*” (Matt. 26:41). And what was true for them is also true for us in spades. We grow weary and sleepy and fail to pray.

Jesus knows we sometimes become discouraged that our prayers are not answered — for which, St. Paul tells us to groan our prayers, and the Holy Spirit will intercede on our behalf (Rom. 8:26).

Jesus knows that events will sometimes cause our prayers to falter. Certainly, it was so for the disciples. In our Gospel, as Jesus is talking to His disciples about His impending crucifixion and resurrection, He tells them, “*In that day you will ask nothing of me.*” He was right. In the days following Jesus’ crucifixion, the disciples were certainly all together, but there’s no indication that they were there in prayer ... rather they huddled in fear!

But prayer is exactly what Christians are given to do in times of need. Jesus is clear about prayer: He wants our prayer; He invites our prayer; He hears our

prayer; He answers our prayer. *“Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”*

His brother James also calls us to pray: *“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. ... Let him sing praise. [that’s a kind of prayer] ... let [the elders] pray over [the sick man], ... pray for one another, that you may be healed.”* Then hear this promise: *“The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working”* (James 5:13-16).

So Luther echoes in the Large Catechism: It is “our duty to pray because of God’s commandment” to use His name rightly: “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.” We are required in that commandment “to praise [His] holy name and call upon it in every need, or to pray. To call upon God’s name is nothing other than to pray,” Luther says (Luther, Large Catechism, Part 3 Prayer, 5). Again Luther: “prayer is not left to my will to do it or leave it undone, but it shall and must be offered at the risk of God’s wrath and displeasure” (LC, 9).

But more than the commandment, Luther says, “we should be more encouraged and moved to pray because God has also added a promise and declared that it shall surely be done for us as we pray.” “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you,” God promises through the Psalmist (50:15). Jesus “says in the Gospel of St. Matthew, ‘Ask, and it will be given to you; ... for everyone who asks receives’ (7:7–8)” (LC, 19). You heard the promises in our introit: *“Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you”; “I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice”; “I call to God, and the LORD will save me.”* And in John, Jesus says, *“[W]hatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.”*

Jesus reminds us here that our access to the Father is through Him. We ask the Father in Jesus’ name, and this is no mere incantation tacked on the end of prayers. It’s not as if, if we don’t tack “in Jesus’ name, I pray” onto our prayers to the Father, then they’re somehow illegitimate or inappropriate; nor is it that we are asking Jesus Himself to intercede with the Father for us that He might answer our prayers. Not at all.

Jesus says, *“I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf.”* We don’t need to ask Jesus to be an intermediary for our prayers, and we surely don’t need to pray to the blessed Virgin as an intermediary with Jesus first. To be sure, our great High Priest *“always lives to make intercession for [us]”* (Heb. 7:25), but this intercession is His constant reminder of His perfect sacrifice for us.

Thus St. Paul writes, *“Jesus our Lord, ... was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand”* (Rom. 4:24–5:2).

Remember, Jesus said, *“the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.”*

There’s the answer. To pray to the Father in Jesus’ name is to pray in faith in the one who came down from the Father’s side into our flesh and took on our sin. To pray to the Father in Jesus’ name is to pray believing in the only Son of God given by the Father to be lifted up on a cross and die, that we might not perish but have everlasting life. To pray to the Father in Jesus’ name is to pray in faith in the Lamb of God who grants us the peace He won for us, in the Passover Lamb sacrificed for our sins and raised up for our justification. To pray to the Father in Jesus’ name is to pray trusting that His shed blood cleanses us from all our sins and makes us clean. To pray to the Father in Jesus’ name is to pray believing in the One who on our behalf overcomes the world with all its tribulations. Believing in Him, we have access to God the Father through His Son.

I like this language — *“through Him.”* To ask in Jesus’ name is to pray acknowledging we have access to the Father through the Son. That’s the way we pray in the church’s prayers: *“through Jesus Christ.”* We normally address God the Father in our prayers, and we conclude them *“through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord.”* This is why we’re bold to pray to the Father as Jesus taught: because, by Holy Baptism, we have been made sons of God through adoption. And that means that He is now also our true Father, and we are His true children. It’s why Jesus teaches us to pray *“Our Father, who art in heaven.”* We are invited in the Lord’s Prayer to pray to our Father in heaven *“as dear children ask their dear father.”*

Children don’t hesitate to ask their fathers, and they know that their fathers will give them what is best for them — neither a serpent nor a scorpion, but what is good (Luke 11:11-12). So let us not hesitate or be anxious, but ask. *“[I]n everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God”* (Phil. 4:6). Sure, the world thinks our prayers are ineffective nonsense, but we Christians know better because of God’s promises. We know better because of Him who promises: Jesus Christ, our Lord.

O Lord, make us righteous people of prayer.

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

Christ is risen! Alleluia!