

Easter 6C (5/9/10 – *The Risen Christ Teaches Us to Pray*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

Dear friends in Christ! Last week we heard how our resurrected Savior pours out His Holy Spirit upon us to give us joy. This week we hear how *The Risen Christ Teaches Us to Pray* ... so that we may receive good gifts from our gracious heavenly Father and that our *joy may be full* – as He says at the beginning of our *Holy Gospel* for this *Sixth Sunday of Easter* [ST. JOHN 16.24]. We know the reason the Triune God must be with us in so many ways – why Christ must dwell with us and abide in us ... and pour out His Holy Spirit upon us ... and assure us that the heavenly Father gladly hears our prayers in His Name. Christ Himself tells us – just as He told the Apostles before us: *In the world you will have tribulation* [JN 16.33b]. In this world we have trials and tribulations – and we need the fullness of the Godhead with us if we are to survive with our faith intact. In this world we have suffering and distress – not the least of which are the temptations that come our way ... to which our weak, sinful flesh so readily succumbs. These times of tribulation – from the world, the devil, and our own flesh – are so very disconcerting ... so very detrimental to our Christian faith and life ... that if Christ had not given us a remedy ... something to do ... something to hold on to ... somewhere to turn, we would completely fall away and be forever lost. **That** is how serious the problem is – so don't take it lightly ... don't brush it off ... don't ignore it.

Do you now believe? – our Lord says – *Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave Me alone.* [JN 16.31-32] Christ is, of course, talking about the hour – that little while into the future – when He would be betrayed to those who came with swords and clubs as against a thief ... would be lifted up on the Cross to die ... and then be buried in the tomb. But what Christ says applies to our time also. It seems that unless we can see the Lord standing before us, we are just too weak to grasp what He has taught us ... hold on to

what He has given us ... and fight the good fight of faith until He delivers us from the battle field. We too easily feel like **we** are alone, abandoned – by family, friends, fellow Christians ... even God Himself sometimes. And when we feel that way, we just don't put up very much of a struggle against the attacks of the evil one. Like a horse that's been broken – we passively let the devil saddle us with the cares and sinful pleasures of the world. Then we allow him to lead us with the bit and bridle of despair ... and to guide us and goad us on with the reins of sinful lust and forbidden desire.

Sometimes it's even worse! Sometimes we **actively** cohort with the evil one – and not only let ourselves be saddled with sin ... but actively and intentionally pursue it. The devil doesn't need to lead us with bridle and bit ... or goad us with rein and whip. We go of our own accord – as fast as we can gallop sometimes. You know that. You've been there and done that – more than you would like. And when we come to our senses – or rather, are brought to understand what we've done by God's Word and the conscience He has placed within us – then we find ourselves distressed and sorrowful ... seeking peace and comfort. And how shall we obtain it?

That is why God has given you the gift of prayer – and encourages you to use it. When it seems like you are alone fighting the battles of life ... alone wrestling the rulers, authorities, and spiritual forces of evil [EPH 6.12], remember these words of our Savior talking about His own abandonment by the Disciples in His hour of greatest need: ***Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with Me*** [JN 16.32]. You are **never** alone. Though you may seem to have the aid of no one, you do indeed have the Triune God on your side. And you may go to Him at any time and place, and ask Him for aid – and He will provide that which is the very best for you ... and at the perfect time.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My Name, He will give it to you. ... Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. [JN 16.23 24] That's what our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ tells you. It is a promise that God the Father will graciously hear your prayer for Jesus' sake.

Because Christ has made Himself your Brother – and taken all that is **just** your own ... namely, all your sin – you have God as your loving, giving Father. And since the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon you – as the Oil of Joy – you are God’s dear children. So ask your heavenly Father with all boldness and confidence, as dear children ask their dear father [SC III. I]. Ask in accord with what Christ has taught you. Ask believing the Word and Work of your Savior for your forgiveness and eternal salvation. Ask with the self-denying humility of the Son, Who in the Garden of Gethsemane – just a very short time after He spoke these words in our *Gospel* text – cried out to the Father: ***Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.*** [LK 22.42] Ask in faith – even ... and especially ... when your faith seems weak – knowing that **because of Christ**, God the Father looks upon you lovingly.

That’s what it means to ***ask the Father in the Name*** of Jesus. To pray in the Jesus’ Name is not some formulaic ending we can tack on to any and every prayer; then expect – even demand – that God the Father will grant us our request because we’ve said the right words. That would be the utmost arrogance – making God our “puppet” to manipulate according to our own twisted, sin-filled desire and will ... making us the “god” and God our servant to wait on our every whim. No. To pray in Jesus’ Name is to pray to God the Father in the way Jesus prayed ... in humility and self-denial ... seeking not our own will but God the Father’s. And all the time that we make our own desires known, we believe that whatever God provides in answer – even if His answer is *No, not now* ... indeed, even if He says *No, not ever* – that it is truly what is best for us ... what will keep us close to God and in the true faith ... what will help us navigate the treacherous waters of this sinful world to safely reach the eternal shores of heaven and the never-ending peace and joy that await us there.

And if you don’t know what to pray exactly ... only know that you need to pray to the loving Father because you or someone you love or the world is

in need – well ... your Savior has taken care of that as well. He's given you the prayer to pray. Just pray: ***Our Father, Who art in heaven...*** As one of my brother pastors put it so well at this year's *Catechism Convocation*: All theology is plagiarism ... God wants you to plagiarize Him. You don't have to be eloquent and able to make up your own wonderful-sounding prayers. You don't have to be able to perfectly analyze your situation and come up with the perfect combination of petitions. God knows what you need even before you ask – indeed, knows what you need better than you do! And He's given you the perfect prayer – ***Our Father, Who art in heaven...*** **That's** praying in the Name of Jesus. **That's** praying according to God's good and gracious will. And you can be assured that God will hear your prayer. You have the Savior's promise on it – signed, sealed, and delivered by His life and death and by His resurrection and ascension on high, where He lives to intercede for you eternally ... as the Scripture says: ***Christ Jesus is the One Who died – more than that, Who was raised – Who is at the right hand of God, Who indeed is interceding for us*** [ROM 8.34]. And you have the Holy Spirit's aid, as Scripture also says: ***Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groaning too deep for words. And He Who searches hearts knows what is the minds of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*** [ROM 8.26-27]

Which is simply to say, you have the whole Triune God with you ... on your side. The Son intercedes in heaven before the eternal throne. The Holy Spirit intercedes in prayer constantly – knowing your need even before you do ... and voicing your need when you have no words to speak. And the heavenly Father hears your prayer – and because He loves you with a true, perfect, everlasting love, always grants what is best for you ... until you see His very best in heaven. So take comfort in the midst of trials, be at peace in the midst of tribulation, and rejoice always in the risen, victorious Christ!

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]