

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
The Sunday after Ascension Day¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the thirtieth Chapter of the Fifth Book of Moses, called Deuteronomy.³

“And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live. And the LORD thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee. And thou shalt return and obey the voice of the LORD, and do all his commandments which I command thee this day. And the LORD thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good: for the LORD will again rejoice over thee for good, as he rejoiced over thy fathers: If thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, and if thou turn unto the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul.

⁷ St. John 16:28b (KJV).
⁸ Genesis 4:26 (KJV).
⁹ St. John 1:14a (KJV).
¹⁰ I Timothy 2:1-6 (KJV).
¹¹ Acts 4:12 (KJV).
¹² St. John 16:24 (KJV).
¹³ Hebrews 10:19-24 (KJV).
¹⁴ St. John 16:24 (KJV).
¹⁵ I John 5:14(KJV).
¹⁶ St. John 14:13 (KJV).
¹⁷ St. John 15:16 (KJV).
¹⁸ III John 2 (KJV).
¹⁹ Rector, St. Benedict’s Anglican Catholic Church, Chapel Hill, NC.

“For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.

“See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”

Or,

Here beginneth the thirty-fourth Chapter of the Fifth Book of Moses, called Deuteronomy.⁴

“And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo [**KNEE-bow**], to the top of Pisgah [**PIZZ-gah**], that is over against Jericho. And the LORD shewed [**SHOWD**] him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan, And all Naphthali [**NAFF-tuh-lye**], and the land of Ephraim [**EE-frih-em**], and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea,

say His Name, and say it as if it were merely the magic words. Invoking the Name of Jesus Christ carries with it the implication of asking according to God’s will, and of living according to His revealed will, as revealed in Scripture through those things He has commanded us.

I would like to pray that the Baltimore Orioles win the World Series (still a Marylander where that is concerned), but I cannot ask such a thing in Christ’s Name. You cannot ask, in Christ’s Name, that you win out over the competition in business, but you can ask, in the Name of Jesus Christ with full confidence and assurance of faith, that He provide your every need. Certainly, we cannot ask God to do evil to others, or to assist us in an immoral cause, and it would be blasphemy to do so, double blasphemy to do so in the Name of Jesus Christ.

So asking for something in the Name of Jesus Christ has everything to do with acknowledging the unity between God the Son and God the Father. Doing so, with awareness and sincerity in our hearts, also provides a valuable check about what we may ask with faith.

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The Rev’d Robert Hart¹⁹
May 13, 2012

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel at Mass for the Fifth Sunday after Easter, commonly called Rogation Sunday, 2012.

² *An Alternative Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised in 1928)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS PROPOSED IN 1928 38 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxi (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxix (CIPBC 1963).

³ Deuteronomy 30:1-end (KJV).

⁴ Deuteronomy 34:1-end (KJV).

⁵ Isaiah 65:17-end (KJV).

⁶ St. John 16:5-end (KJV).

confidence. It is understandable, therefore why some would be confused.

Some will make the problem worse by telling you that if you really have faith, you will always be healed, miracles will happen everyday, and you will enjoy wealth and prosperity as a sign of God's favor. They twist a simple greeting from Scripture and make a doctrinal statement out of it, namely these words, "*Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.*"¹⁸

But that was not a revelation from God containing a promise for all who have faith; it was, for anyone who knows how to read with comprehension, a greeting from John himself, no more significant than saying, "Godspeed." John was being polite and friendly, and that is all there is to it (the Epistle is Scripture and therefore inspired by the Holy Spirit, but it was also a letter from a man to someone specific, and has a human element, namely a simple greeting).

It is equally wrong to assume that we cannot pray with faith that God will intervene for good in the lives of those we love, and to meet our needs. God's will is not some clouded unknowable mystery, so that all we can say is "thy will be done," with no real substantial petitions for those in need. Rather, the issue of God's will is partly an attitude of heart that we must have, that is, the resolution that by the grace of God at work through the Holy Spirit, we will walk henceforth in newness of life in obedience to the will of God as He revealed it by His commandments. It is no good trying to know the will of God unless we accept the commandments that contain the revelation of what His will most certainly is.

In this light, to pray in the name of Jesus is not merely to be a name-dropper, to impress the Father by claiming to know Someone in the ultimate *Who's Who* directory. How can we presume to think we have asked anything in the Name of Jesus Christ merely because we have spoken His Name? Anyone can

And the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar [**ZOE-urr**]. And the LORD said unto him, This is the land which I sware unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither.

"So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor [**beth-PEA-are**]: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.

"And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.

"And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days: so the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended.

"And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the LORD commanded Moses.

"And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, In all the signs and the wonders, which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh [**FAY-row**], and to all his servants, and to all his land, And in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses shewed [**SHOWD**] in the sight of all Israel."

Or,

Here beginneth the seventeenth Verse of the sixty-fifth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.⁵

"For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old

man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith [SETH] the LORD."

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fifth Verse of the sixteenth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.⁶

"... But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew [SHOW] you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew [SHOW] it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of

in my Name," He said. *"Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."*¹² As the Epistle to the Hebrews puts it:

*"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works."*¹³

And, what are we to ask for? Above all, in this text, we are to ask for the Holy Spirit, the other Comforter.

In this Ascensiontide, as we prepare for the Day of Pentecost, hoping for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in power, let us have these words as frontlets between our eyes: *"Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."*¹⁴

Some people believe that the Name of Jesus Christ will work like a magic charm if only we have faith. I suggest it has more to do with the words of St. John in his First Epistle: *"And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us."*¹⁵ On one hand, some may say, we have these words from Jesus: *"And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son",*¹⁶ and *"that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you."*¹⁷

Some may interpret the words from the Gospel of John to indicate that all we need to do is ask in His Name, and others may interpret the words from the Epistle to mean that we may ask nothing with real confidence, because how could we know the will of God? Yet John writes this about why we may have

As one Person complete in two natures, Himself both fully God and fully Man, Jesus Christ is our Mediator. No man comes to the Father but by Him. That is true of our salvation, it is true of our worship, *it is true also of our prayers.*

This is why you must read the Epistle to the Hebrews. In that Epistle we are told all of these things very clearly. In addition, we are told that the Lord Jesus, seated even now at the right hand of God, ever lives to make intercession for us. Using the Old Testament picture of the High Priest who once a year took the blood of the sacrifice into the Holy of Holies, the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of Christ's once for all sacrifice, that is that He died once for all sinners, and of His ascension to the Father's throne as the true offering of the true High Priest into the true Holy of Holies, of which the temple was merely a picture, a shadow or type.

The blood of the sacrifices in the Old Testament was sprinkled on the Mercy Seat before the Ark of the Covenant, inside the veil, in the Holy of Holies- the קֹדֶשׁ הַקֳּדָשִׁים (*Kadesh h'kadeshim*). This type was given to teach of the true offering in which the Son of God would offer Himself, and His blood would be the true Atonement, the true כִּפּוּר (*Kippor*). And that He would rise from the dead and present His own death and sacrifice, the shedding of His blood, the pouring out of His soul unto death, upon prolonging His days by rising to life again. And, that He would ascend back to the Father to be our Mediator, pleading for us with the scars from those wounds from which His blood was shed.

To pray in the Name of Jesus reminds us of these things. It reminds us that we need a Mediator, because we are sinners. It reminds us that He died for our sins, rose again and ascended into heaven. It reminds us that He is the one Mediator between God and Man because He is fully God and fully man, unique as the one whose Name alone is given under heaven among men by which we must be saved.¹¹ *"Hitherto have ye asked nothing*

mine, and shall shew [SHOW] it unto you. A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father. Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that he saith [SETH], A little while? we cannot tell what he saith [SETH]. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me? Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you. And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew [SHOW] you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God. Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye

might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

In today’s Second Lesson, our attention ought to focus on the right hand of God, to which the Lord Jesus was going to ascend when, as He foretold His disciples, He was going to “*leave the world, and go to the Father*”.⁷ And we should think about that position next to the Throne of Heaven when we think about prayer, which is asking—rogation (from the Latin verb *rogare*, meaning “to ask”). And we ought to be focusing on what it means to ask in this new way that our Lord Jesus teaches here.

Why are we told to ask what we will of the Father in the name of Jesus Christ? In Genesis we see that there came a time when men first called upon the Name of the Lord. That was during the life of one named Enos: “*And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD.*”⁸ When I read this in Hebrew I saw that it really should be translated: “then began men to call in the Name of the Lord.” It was quite unmistakable: (בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה) *B’Shem Adonai*. So, in using the words, “*ask in My Name,*” the Lord Jesus is again letting us know that He and the Father *are One*.

Beyond that, we are told to pray to the Father in the human Name of the Person Who is the Eternal Word, the nature He took into His uncreated eternal Person when “*the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us....*”⁹ We do not pray to the Father without coming in the Name of the Son of God, specifically, the human Name of Jesus Christ. We could speak of Him as God the only begotten Son, or as the Word (or *λόγος Logos*). These are Names that speak of Him as God; and yet, in His hu-

man nature He is still One with the Father, while He shares our nature; fully God and fully man.

Can we not simply come to the Father without this Man acting as our Mediator? Are we not good enough? The answer is no. We are not good enough to come to the Father, because we are sinners. If you are looking for a religion that flatters you, affirms you, and tells you how wonderful you are, you have come to the wrong place. Here we are all self-confessed “miserable offenders.” We spend a great deal of our time when we pray together, asking the Lord to have mercy upon us. So, no, we are not good enough to come to the Father without a Mediator.

Saint Paul wrote in the first Epistle to Saint Timothy, in the second chapter:

*“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”*¹⁰

This passage speaks of prayer and God’s will that people will repent and be saved. In speaking of both of these things, salvation and prayer, Paul is moved to remind us that we have as our only Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus who gave Himself a ransom for all. He overcame the separation between the uncreated God and human creatures by taking created nature into His uncreated Person, becoming fully man while remaining fully God. He overcame the separation between God and man due to sin by dying for our sins on the Cross. He overcame the separation between the Living God and our death by overcoming death.