

As Christians we know that prayer is important. But almost immediately with this knowledge comes the feeling of guilt. We know that we should pray more. But praying can be such a battle! Sometimes we want to pray, but then we simply don't do it.

On top of this, many surveys, done amongst Christians, reveal just this: How little Christians pray! Hence the many efforts, pamphlets and booklets written on the how to steps of a successful prayer life. Even prayer movements have been started to get Christians to pray. But what about the Gospel? Is their good news with regard to prayer for us as Christians? Jesus saw the need to focus our attention on what Christian prayer is. What distinguishes the prayer of Christians, and the prayer life of Christians, from all other prayer movements?

In the Gospel today Jesus reveals that there is a profound difference between the prayers of His disciples before His crucifixion and after His resurrection.

Jesus says in verse 23: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." What does Jesus mean by saying this? Before Jesus' crucifixion the disciples had only asked questions and favours of Jesus, but they had not asked the Father in the Name of Jesus! They had asked Jesus, in their own name, according to their own will! Certainly not in the name of Jesus! Now Jesus revealed to them the utterly new position or standing from which they would henceforth pray to Jesus' Father and their Father in heaven, namely, in His name!

First we need to consider even more what He means by referring to "In that day". That is, after experiencing the risen Lord. After seeing that God does what He says. His words are not empty phrases. What He promises happens. In other words after seeing and then believing that the Words of Christ are true, after realising what Christ had fulfilled the disciples would come to ask the Father in the name of Jesus. The working together of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit would be revealed to them. They would realise the plan of God. They would realise how foolish their own desires and questions really were.

"In the name of Jesus" means asking what Jesus wants for us. Asking together with him, not without him. In everyday life it also works like this, that if you ask in someone else's name you have to be sure that what you ask is in line with what that person approves of. Otherwise you would be misusing that person's name to get something that only you wanted.

Asking "in the name of Jesus" is therefore not a magic formula which we can hook onto our prayer to get what we want, and then be disappointed because "it didn't work". To the contrary, truly asking "in the name of Jesus" presupposes that our old self has died with Jesus on the cross.

This is what had happened to the Apostles. They wanted a political messiah. They didn't get him. They wanted to become part of the royalty on earth. Instead they became servants of the Word, persecuted by both Jews and Romans. So, their own desires regarding God's salvation were completely crucified and buried with Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

But when Jesus came to them, alive, in peace, with His resurrected Body, new hope, new faith, new understanding was born. The same happens to us as we encounter the crucified and living Christ in his Word and Sacrament. This is the basis of New Testament Christian prayer. Asking with this Word in mind, being united in Christ by faith, being united with his will, is asking "in the name of Jesus".

Therefore, as believing disciples in Christ we may approach our heavenly Father claiming all his blessings and promises for ourselves. Indeed, whatever we will ask of the Father in His name, He will give to us!

We may approach God the heavenly Father, the Almighty, as children of God with whom he is well-pleased! The heavenly Father regards us as His own. He loves us and treats us just as he loves and hears His own beloved Son, Jesus.

This makes everything very straightforward, totally uncomplicated, plain, wonderful [24]: "ask, and ye shall receive...". Pray and you will receive! Ask for forgiveness of sins and you will receive! In abundance, completely. This gives joy. Ask for the Holy Spirit. This gives peace into our lives on earth, as we won't receive peace from the world.

To underline what He means, Jesus wraps up this passage saying [33]: "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." All we need is to be "in Jesus". When we are in Him we will ask and we will receive. This will be in response to the promise of Christ we hear. The Holy Spirit will prompt us as we hear the Word of Christ. As we ask we will receive. The peace of the Lord will come over us in the midst of all tribulations and fears.

Dear congregation: Christian prayer is a gift, not a burden. It is a fruit of the Gospel. Amen.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ