

Easter 5, 2017 – Rogation Sunday

Ask and Ye Shall Receive?

St. Andrew's Parish – Jacksonville, Or

By Rev. Mr. Bill Baker

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” (John 16:20-24)

Well, what are we waiting for? Here it is right in scripture, whatever you ask for in the name of Jesus will be given to you. You want a new car? A bigger house? How about four-day weekends with increased pay to compensate all your time off? How about a singing voice like Frank Sinatra or Alicia Keys (depending on our favorite era)? What's your pleasure? In the 1986 movie version of Crossroads one of the main characters is a black man that goes by the name Blind Dog. He is a famous blues harp player that had great success and all the glories of being talented and famous, but now finds himself down on his luck fleeing a nursing home to get his life back. Back from what, is the big question? You see, early in his life Blind Dog made a deal with the devil and was given his hearts desire for the exchange of his soul. He had a fantastic life doing what he loved best on the borrowed talents given by the devil himself who goes by the name Scratch. The story ends with a grand revelation that should be familiar to all of us...life is a vapor...worldly gain is temporary. The lesson here is that any desire for any earthly thing over and above our relationship with our Father in heaven is a delusional path that does not end at the proverbial pearly gates.

Taken out of context the verses we just heard can have the same appeal. *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.”* Sounds like Jesus wants to give us our hearts desire doesn't it! TV evangelists preach such things everyday in their church broadcasts. “If you don't have everything you want, just pray to JESUS and send your generous donation to the address below and we will help you pray.” It is easy to see how these

verses can lead some down a path of misconception. It is incredible how many fall for such deception.

But our Lord does want us to pray and to ask doesn't he? How many of us have prayed in Jesus name for something and not had that prayer answered? Our response to this seeming dilemma is that Jesus did answer our prayer...he just said "no" this time. And what does it mean that hitherto we have asked nothing in his name? To gain some perspective it seems necessary to me to include some previous verses for clarity.

Hopefully it will become obvious from these verses, that our Lord desires our complete fulfillment, that he wants us to interact with him and to seek that joy which has been set-aside for us. But it will also become obvious that the complete fulfillment of our joy doesn't come without pain. What becomes not so obvious is whether or not we are responding appropriately to Christ's petition to pray. Are we asking...are we failing to ask...are we asking with the right intentions? Here's the broader perspective taking in the three previous verses:

"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 remembered 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. Puzzling. In what day is Jesus referring too here?

Remember, this conversation is taking place just prior to Jesus going before Pilate and His own crucifixion. These words could be taken as a cry against immorality in society, the unjust who prosper or an uncompassionate system that would allow those without to die in the streets. While this may be enough to lament there is still something more dreadful that overrides all our anguishes put together. As Christians, we to this day, lament the death of Christ understanding that it was our own sins that hung him on that cross...even those sins that we have yet to commit. All our sins taken together, all the pain they inspire are all the result of our choice to turn away from the love that created us. The church has been weeping and lamenting the Fall ever since, just

as a women in the pains of birth. But a time will come when our joy will be complete and we will remember no more the pains of this life...our sorrows will be cast away and our hearts will rejoice! A birth will take place and it will be our birth as we enter paradise to be with Jesus Christ! And it is in **that day** that we shall ask nothing of our Lord...Why you ask? Let's look to the early church fathers for our answer:

"Christ says that in that day when we see him face to face, we will no longer ask any thing of him because all our longings and questions will be answered (Augustine). But while we are still here, our petitions are important, and one who is scrupulous about prayer will not address prayer to the Father without the Son (Origen). Having Christ as our advocate with the Father, we can be confident in our prayers because of the power of his name (Cyprian). And so we can ask for 'anything' in his name, although 'anything' should be understood of those things that have to do with the life of blessedness and salvation (Bede).

As Christians we are intrigued with modern day miracles, near death experiences said to contain messages from the other side and biblical prophecy happening before our very eyes. It is a difficult task to decipher reality from fiction when we see so darkly through the glass. What's important is not so much what is going on in the world around us as it is what is going on in own hearts. You see, God is in control and we have nothing to worry about if our hearts and minds are focused on Him. In Old Testament prophecy the message was never about gaining worldly possessions but looking to the first Advent when God himself would become incarnate, walk amongst his creation and in the end extending the greatest gift that can ever be given...eternal life. The view and the prayers of 21st century Christians should be the same. The sign of a true Christian is not one that prays for things of and in this world but one who looks to the second coming of Christ as the highest priority, the second Advent where we will release our burdens and come together as the true body of Christ. The focus of our prayers must be to have the strength to run the race and cross the finish line...that is our goal and must be our priority! But, Christ does solicit our prayers and invites us to ask. You see, as long as our hearts are in the right place and our desires for unity within Christ are in line with the Will of God, then we can ask for anything in His name because our prayers will be properly aligned with God's grace and mercy.

It is within these bounds that it becomes okay to pray for things that are of this world. Prayer for success in the workplace, prayer for healing, prayer for safe travel, praying that your car doesn't run out of gas before you get to church. Our prayers are stronger now since the first Advent because we have an advocate with the Father in the God-Man Jesus Christ who feels our pain and understands our desires. *"Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be fulfilled."* Christ wants our joy to be full...that is why he came...that is why he hung on the Cross and that is why He meets us at the Table.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen