

IN NOMINE JESU

RIGHT PRAYER OFFERED TO THE FATHER IN CHRIST JESUS

Christ is Risen!

Hear again the Word of God for this sixth Sunday, Rogate, in the season of the Resurrection of our Lord,

For (there is) one God, and one Mediator of God and men, (the) Man Christ Jesus, the One giving Himself (as) ransom for all men, by the witness of its own season.¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

This week, we have heard of a conjunction of remembrances. They have been poured into our ears through the theme of the week, the texts of the day, and the minor feast which commemorates the Faith God gave and sustained in Saints Philip and James. The theme for the week comes to us from at least the 4th century AD. The theme of the day dates to about A.D. 33. The joint minor feast of the Philip and James may be traced back to the dedication of the Church of the Apostles in Rome circa A.D. 563. It is all bound together in words like these from the Letter to Timothy:

I continue to beseech (you) then first of all to continually (make) intercessions, prayers, approaches, thanksgivings for all men, for kings and all the ones being in prominence, that quiet and still life we may continually led into, in all godliness and gravity.²

The over-arching theme, then, of this week which encompasses those three historical reminiscing's is God's call to right prayer. That, we are reminded today, is to be continually offered by the faithful in Christ Jesus to our heavenly Father. The proper name of this week of prayer is Rogate.

¹ 1 Timothy 2:4-5.

² 1 Timothy 2:1-2.

That has been drawn from a title given to three special days of fasting and prayer that started in the churches in the late A.D. 300s. Remember, for the Early Church, the Feast of the Ascension, annually celebrated on the fortieth day after the annual commemoration of Christ's resurrection from the dead, was a High Feast. That meant that people were called to take time to prepare themselves for hearing of Jesus' taking our flesh back to God's intended place for it: His right Hand of power, might, and dominion over the Creation. (Think about how such times for prayer and reflection are found in the preparatory, penitential times we have before Christmas and Easter each year).

Prayer, fasting, and preparation, (rogation days) were long ago connected to the Feast of the Ascension. Their attachment took place in a time of the 50 days of Easter joy. The unique days in the season of Christ's resurrection, gradually spread throughout Christian churches over a period of about 225 years. At the Council of Orleans in A.D. 511, all dioceses of the Church were called to the practices of the three rogation days.

All it took were a major earthquake (AD 469, Vienne, Gaul) and a disastrous harvest to bring the Church to the realization that we need to be in prayer even in a season of feasting and celebration! Some 300 years after that, the Bishop of Rome declared that this week would hold a set penitential time for all the churches. The Rogation days, and Rogate became part of the life of the Church catholic to encourage fasting and prayer before the Great High Feast of Christ's Ascension.

For our age of the Church, in many places of our confession, Rogate

and the rogation days are a failing memory. Yet, in congregations which use the more ancient series of readings, as we, the readings still direct us to remember God's call *to continually (make) intercessions, prayers, approaches, thanksgivings for all men....* Such is part of our stewardship of God's Word. After all, the offerings of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving are what you, as priests of the Lord's New Covenant Church, are to present at His Altar Table—continually!

St. Paul, in writing instructions for the Churches overseen by St. Timothy lists four categories which are to be continually made in the churches. All are faithful expressions of Jesus' teaching which was heard again today. Remember that He said,

Truly, truly I continue to say to all of you, "Whatever you all may ask the Father, He will give to you in the Name of Me."³

In John's Good News book, whenever Jesus uses the words we translate, "*Truly, truly I continue to say to all of you...*" that which follows is the main teaching point for His followers. He calls them, us, you all, to ask the Father for whatever is needed, in Jesus' Name.

St. Paul takes that teaching, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, interprets it for Timothy's oversight of the churches. The first category of prayer the churches are called to may be translated "intercessions," or "supplications." Such are to be presented by congregations, speaking with one voice, to the King of kings.

The word, which was in common use, was chosen by the Apostle to indicate that the intercessors had been granted an audience with the king.

³ John 16:23b.

Think if you were given a few minutes to address the President of the United States or our Governor. Would you not take time to compose your supplications so that every word would have weight? You would surely want him to hear and respond to the exact needs you were presenting to him on behalf of others.

The second offering the congregations of Christ are to make is translated, “prayers.” This, in the original language, is the general word for prayer to God. Such includes that which is drawn from the Word of God. In biblical form, these prayers would be carefully constructed by restating part of God’s Word, giving thanks for God’s Word, confessing that we have not kept God’s Word, and then making particular requests from that word. The greatest of these “prayers” the congregations are to offer are the Psalms. (Think of the direction the Pastor and assistants face when the Psalms are prayed).

The third sacrifice which Timothy, and all congregational overseers and Elders are to see the churches offer may be translated “approaches,” or “thankful intercessions.” Such are more free-flowing in corporate worship. They are those composed on the spot, say from a congregation member handing a prayer request to a Pastor, Deacon, or Elder before the Lord’s Service begins.

The fourth congregational offering is often translated, “thanksgivings.” These prayers are, in concept, separated from the first three. They offer to God, in the Name of Jesus, “grateful acknowledgements for past mercies to humble, worshipful, trustful

requests.”⁴ Such prayers enable the congregations to remember that all the blessings we receive are truly undeserved on account of our sinfulness.

Perhaps by now you have been biblically reinforced in the reasons why we do not rush through or abbreviate the corporate prayers of the Church. Right prayer is offered to the Father in Christ Jesus by the Church and all her members. As the Holy Spirit gathers us in corporate prayer, He works to keep in our memories the reality that we have God’s calling to intercede, petition, pray, and give thanks, especially for those who cannot rightly pray for themselves. Of course, this includes those who cannot yet articulate their prayers – the pre-born and infant humans, the comatose, senile or otherwise mentally incapacitated in our world. In addition, these annual rogation days are given to remind us that our sacrifices of prayer are also offered for those who have no Faith in Christ. St. Paul even gives us the divine reasons for our taking time in public worship to continue to offer *intercessions, prayers, approaches, thanksgivings for all men...* when he declares:

*that quiet and still life we may continually led into, in all godliness and gravity.*⁵

As God’s people are joined in His Word, we offer back to Him prayers grounded and flowing from that Word. We can be sure that God hears and answers our requests. This He does in His time according to His ways. He desires to lead us into a tranquil and still life – not for divine navel gazing – but that we might daily live in godliness and seriousness.

⁴ Lenski, R.C.H. “The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Collossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon,” Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964. 539.

⁵ *1 Timothy 2:2b.*

Most of you know that living in that manner means simply confessing our sins and receiving Christ's blood-bought forgiveness. It is summed up in daily returning to our baptisms. There, in the Word of God, we are empowered to drown our Old Natures with all sins and evil lusts. In that same washing of regeneration and renewal, our New Natures arise to live rightly before God in purity.

In the renewed life of Christ, in our corporate prayers, we are joined to God's working of His antecedent will. That is, we participate in the will of God, *Who, all men He wills to be saved, and into deep knowledge of truth to have come into.*⁶ We hear, each year, in these days of prayer and fasting, that it is God's revealed desire that every person ever conceived be saved from His wrath, sin, death, and eternal hell. We are reminded that our prayers join our minds to His in declaring His saving work for all. We also remember that, when people reject God's work, it does not mean that He did not will to save them. After all, Jesus died for all, and now, the Apostle still declares:

*For (there is) one God, and one Mediator of God and men, (the) Man Christ Jesus, the One giving Himself (as) ransom for all men, by the witness of its own season.*⁷

With those words, the faithful congregations are reminded that we have One Who is like us in all but sin, Who stands before the eternal Father on our behalf. He presents Himself as the final sacrifice for all sin, and for all sinners. It is through Him that our *intercessions, prayers, approaches, thanksgivings* are acceptable to God. In Him, we have the power to celebrate

⁶ 1 Timothy 2:4.

⁷ 1 Timothy 2:4-5.

the muted joy of the three days before the Great Feast of the Ascension. In Jesus, we are free to remember Philip and James, and their confession of Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of all sins unto death. And it is in this time of prayer that we are still free to declare:

Christ is risen!

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Resurrection VI (*LSB One-year series*)

Psalm 66:1-2; Numbers 21:4-9; I Timothy 2:1-6; John 16:23-33

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Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria