

“Asking in the Name of Jesus”

Let’s get right to it. Jesus says in today’s Gospel: ***“I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”***

How do we understand that? What is the promise Jesus is making?

Is Jesus saying . . . *“You can have anything you want in life — just ask!”* *“You see something you like on TV? Name it and claim it!”* *“I will give you all kinds of treasures, goodies, bling, and belongings. They are all yours for the asking.”* *“Cars, mansions, artwork, jewelry, solid gold bathrooms, silver spoons and diamond studded ashtrays — anything you can imagine, just ask me for it. It’s yours.”* *“Know why you haven’t won the lottery? Nope, it’s not just because you never did buy a ticket — it’s because you never did ask me to rig it so you would win. So ask already!”*

Or is Jesus saying something that has less to do with material possessions? Perhaps something like . . . *“If you want peace of mind, ask me for it.”* *“If you are looking for serenity, it’s only just on the other side of your asking for it.”* *“Tired of dealing with that chronic condition? I’ll bet you didn’t ask me to do something about it, did you?”* *“Mom’s been sick a long time, hasn’t she? Hmmmm, I wonder what you might do to get that to go away? Could you, say, ask Me to remove it?”*

What exactly is this promise from Jesus? Let’s begin at the core of what Jesus wants us to know. Why would we ask, and why would He respond? Look at the text — verses 13 and 14. What does it say? Look for the purpose statement: ***“ . . . so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”*** ***“ . . . so that . . .”*** [ἵνα (hína) in Greek = df. *“in order that”*] That word introduces a conditional phrase, and always is about the purpose for something taking place. So at the core of Jesus’ statement here is the idea that glorifying the Father is an important agenda item — indeed, it is THE agenda item for Jesus.

Listen to Jesus on this subject:

“If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, ‘He is our God,’ though you do not know him. But I know him; if I would say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him and I keep his word.” (John 8:54)

On the sickness of Lazarus: ***“This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”*** (John 11:4)

After the raising of Lazarus, as people were coming to Him in awe, Jesus reflects: ***“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ‘Father, glorify your name.’”*** Then a voice came from heaven, ***“I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”*** (John 12:23-28)

In the Upper Room, during the Last Supper, just after Judas had left to arrange for the betrayal, Jesus said, ***“Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.”*** (John 13:31-32)

Continuing in the Upper Room, Jesus tells the disciples: ***“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”*** (John 15:7-8)

Yet again, in this Final Discourse, we hear our Lord say: ***“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not***

“speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” (John 16:12-15)

And then in what is now referred to as Christ’s High Priestly Prayer, he asks the Father for this: *“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.”* (John 17:1-10)

Do you catch the drift? Five themes emerge . . .

1) The glory of Jesus is His crucifixion. Not His ascension, not His seat at God’s right hand, not even His resurrection. The old Lenten hymn has it right: *“In the cross of Christ I glory . . .”* But this is not a glory that Jesus styles for Himself — it is given to Him by the Father. The Father glorifies Him in this act of obedience.

2) In concert with that, Jesus’ obedience gives glory to the Father.

3) We who now abide in Jesus (recall your baptism?) also give glory to the Father in our obedience and faith, that is, by bearing *“much fruit”*.

What was given to Jesus now is given to us. The Holy Spirit does this work.

4) In our bearing much fruit, we in turn give glory to Jesus as we work and witness to the world.

5) Part of that work and witness is the life of prayer to which Jesus calls us, to which the Father invites us, and for which the Spirit equips us.

So . . . what does it mean to “*Ask in the Name of Jesus*”? At its heart, it means to pray in such manner that the Father and Jesus are glorified. Which turns it one-hundred-eighty degrees away from those prayers that ask for “stuff” and “more stuff.” When we turn prayer into a shopping list, do we thus glorify God? Oh, maybe (MAYBE!!) if we were to suddenly be inundated with wealth we might give thanks to God (although there is every reason to suppose that our sinful impulses would not yield to that). Even if we make a shopping list, not of selfish design, but of altruistic temperament . . . is that any better? Yes, . . . a little. But it still winds up being our agenda, what *we* want.

So, Pastor, are you suggesting that we put off praying for ourselves and/or others because such prayers are, as you call them, mere “shopping lists”? No. The Bible and Jesus Himself invite . . . nay, encourage . . . nay, command us to pray. But how can we come to prayer so that it truly is “*Asking in the Name of Jesus*”?

My fear is this — that we will wind up turning “in the name of Jesus” into some kind of incantation that we think can use to work the right “magic” or “mojo” and get us what we want. And I hear this . . . people praying their considerable list of items by which they seek to counsel God on how God ought to be running the universe . . . This illness must be removed . . . That leader must be retained . . . We claim that job opportunity . . . We must have that solution to this problem . . . Oh, and by the way, God, (in case You weren’t so inclined to do what I have asked . . . or was it ‘demanded’?) “*in the Name of Jesus. Amen.*”

Where do you hear this, Pastor. From us? (*“Is it I, Lord?”*) No, most of the time you insist that I do the public praying, so I don’t get to hear you pray very often. I hear it from TV and radio religious personalities . . . from friends who style themselves as prayer warriors . . . from books and articles on prayer. Years ago, when I was told that I was on a call list to a congregation, a friend said to me: *“You want that? It’s yours! I’ll pray for you to get that call.”* I told her that she would do no such thing on my behalf, and that such an approach to prayer was not so much evidence of faith as of arrogance (to her credit, she still prays for me . . . and I continue to pray that it will be a very different type of prayer than what she was offering in that instance!).

Praying “in the Name of Jesus” does not give you a magic wand that pops God’s bounty out of the proverbial hat. There is something altogether different at work here.

Martin Luther had a barber by the name of Peter Beskendorf. Peter had written to Dr. Martin to inquire about how to pray. It is a rather detailed answer that Luther wrote in response, but two things shine out from his response that we would do well to heed.

First, Luther encourages Peter to set aside time for prayer, and not let other factors, other things that could grab away prayer time to interfere.

Second, Luther suggests that Peter begin with a “warm up” prayer — Walter Trobisch writes of this concept: *“The expressions ‘to warm up the heart’ until it ‘comes to itself,’ ‘feels like it,’ ‘gets in the mood’ occur several times in his letter. Actually the whole letter is nothing but detailed and practical instruction on how to ‘warm up the heart’ before the Bible study starts, and it ends with the statement, ‘The one who is trained [in this warming-up practice] will well be able to use a chapter of Scripture as a lighter [Feuerzung — the same word used in modern German for a pocket lighter] to kindle a fire in his heart.’”*

For that warm-up prayer Luther writes that Peter the Barber should take

a portion of Scripture (Luther suggested the Ten Commandments) and apply them as four strands in a rope: *“Out of each commandment I make a garland of four twisted strands. That is, I take each commandment first as a teaching, which is what it actually is, and I reflect upon what our Lord God so earnestly requires of me here. Secondly, I make out of it a reason for thanksgiving. Thirdly, a confession and fourthly, a prayer petition.”*

Do you catch what Luther does here? He braids these four strands together so that my prayer is no longer MY prayer, but prayer that is first and foremost grounded in God’s Word, then filtered through my relationship with God and Christ my Savior, and only then offered up as petition or intercession.

Asking in the Name of Jesus is not just invoking the Name to get what you want. It is invoking the Name so that you want what God wants. God knows what you need. God knows also what you want. You know what you want. But you don’t always know what you need — or in some cases, you do know what you need, but it conflicts with what you want.

In faith, we should desire to find ourselves in that wonderful place where what God wants for us is what we want for us, and what God wants for others is what we want for others. When we have come to that place, we are truly “asking in the Name of Jesus.” That is, we are not simply using the Name of Jesus, we are asking from that place of identity that is ours in Christ — I ask, and since I am “in Christ” what I ask is “in the Name of Jesus.”

Jesus has never promised to give us the desires of our hearts. He has promised to give us hearts filled with His desires. He has promised that the God who gave us His own Son will also give us **“all good things”** with Him. How the world defines **“all good things”** and how God views **“all good things”** — not even close.

So here’s the promise: **“I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that**

the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.” So ask away. But, before you ask, reflect for a while until you are absolutely convinced that you are asking in Jesus’ Name. Here’s a good way to begin (and again, I have Dr. Luther to thank for this): *“In the name of the Father, and of the Son (+) and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”* Thus you were baptized, thus you were brought “into Christ,” thus you *“live and move and have [your] being,”* and thus you can pray in hope, in joy, in confident faith, “asking in the Name of Jesus.”

Amen.