

From the Old Testament of the Day: So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole, and if a serpent bit anyone, he would like at the bronze serpent and live. [Numbers 21.9]
From the Holy Gospel: In that day you will ask nothing of Me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in My name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. [John 16.23-24]

This is the 5th Sunday after Easter, named in the Latin, “Rogate: Pray Ye! Prayer is a privilege, and because it is a privilege given to you by your heavenly Father, hailed as your privilege by your Savior, God the Son, and driven heavenward from deep within your soul by God the Holy Ghost, prayer is both your right and your responsibility. Through prayer, you participate in the work of God. It is, in fact, your personal priesthood before God.

I.

Beginning in the Old Testament, God sets the pattern for how the faithful understand themselves and how they are both served and also serve others in the life of believers. And at the heart of this being served and serving one another is the privilege of prayer. In the Old Testament of the Day for this 5th Sunday after Easter, you hear of one

of the many incidents in the wilderness wandering of God's Old Testament people, incidents that show the people of God grumbling against God. In this case, the people of God's choosing have raised the familiar complaint: “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness,” and on this occasion the source of the complaint is: “For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food,” speaking of the daily miracle of manna from heaven.

This grumbling brings this response from God: “The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died.” Soon, God's chosen ones come to their senses, and the leaders come to Moses and say, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that He take away the serpents from us.” And God gives Moses the remedy: He is to make a snake of bronze and

to set it on a pole, and God promises: “Everyone who is bitten, when he looks upon it, shall live.”

Here you see the heart of Christian prayer! It is not a matter of doing, but first and foremost, it is a matter of pondering. The key to being saved from poisonous snakes was not to do, but to ponder, to ponder the snake of God – the bronze snake, a symbol that points to the New Testament, and to your Savior, who is put upon the pole of the cross, their becoming that bearer of all sin and evil, that by His death, you have life eternal, and by His final word from the cross – “it is finished” – you have the complete forgiveness of all your sins.

II.

And so, in the Holy Gospel, Jesus promises to you, “Whatsoever you shall ask the heavenly Father in My name” -- “Whatsoever you ask in My legacy, in My teachings and purposes, in the light of what My person and work means for you--not, “means to you,” – understanding what is true about you in your relationship to God – “I grant unto you.”

It is the New Testament version and promise of the Old Testament bronze snake on the pole. The New Testament promise begins with the call and invitation to ponder: to ponder one's sins that put a barrier between the sinner and God, and to ponder one's gift and promise from God, the gift of complete and everlasting forgiveness on the basis of the death and resurrection of the Savior. The gift of forgiveness, life, and salvation is at the heart of the privilege of Christian prayer.

Christians praying in “the name of Jesus” – as Christ calls you and invites you to do – means praying in the relationship to God that you have on account of Jesus and His work upon the holy cross. It means to ponder the gift and promise of God that is the foundation of all Christian prayer. It means that you pray in the light of how God promises that He sees you in Christ and for Christ's sake. Christian believers pray as humble sinners, who now also are the heavenly Father's children on account of

Christ being lifted on the pole of the holy cross. Thus, it is there, at the cross, that your Savior makes this promise to you: “Whatsoever you shall ask the heavenly Father in My name, I grant unto you.”

III.

Remember, behind this promise from God to you is the bottom line for your understanding of the ways and the purposes of God as He deals with you: He remains God, and you remain His creature. As God, He promises to give you everything that you need from Him. This promise is made in the context that He remains your heavenly Father and that your standing with Him is based on the person and work of your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Through Christ, and on account of His saving work on the cross, God the Father promises to give you every good thing that a heavenly Father would give to His own Son, -- and you, as a priest of God, are lead by the Holy Ghost rightly to ask for those very things that serve the needs of you, the needs of your loved ones, and indeed, the needs of the world for

which Christ gave Himself as the true Prophet, Priest, and King. Just as everything that Jesus has done for you and for the world is necessary to be done, so in the life of Christian prayer, the measure of genuine prayer is that it, too, serves the needs that God promises to fulfill for you, for your loved ones, and for the world. It is from the focus on the matter of Christian prayer that your Savior renews today His promise to you: “Whatsoever you shall ask the heavenly Father in My name, I grant unto you! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen!