

Wednesday, June 24, 2020

Praying in Jesus' name

- Pastor Hank French

*Very truly, I tell you,
if you ask anything of the Father in my name,
he will give it to you (John 16:23).*

From the earliest days, Christians have prayed in the name of Jesus, largely because of the promise, repeated some six times in the Gospel of John, that whatever we ask for in the name of Jesus will be given to us. Day after day, from all corners of the globe, millions upon millions of prayers ascend to heaven punctuated with the words, "...in the name of Jesus."

We should note, however that it is a magical misunderstanding to think that tacking the words "in the name of Jesus" onto the end of a prayer increases its efficacy. It doesn't. Praying in the name of Jesus has no more magical power than does a baseball player making the sign of the cross before facing the first pitch. The name of Jesus is not a talisman by which desires are satisfied and the otherwise unobtainable obtained. Prayer does not work that way.

We should not be wondering if the name of Jesus has magical power; we should be wondering what the name of Jesus *stands for*. What did Jesus stand for, and what did Jesus stand against? What did Jesus call his followers to stand for and against? If Jesus told us to pray for our enemies and do good to those who would harm us—and he did—then to pray that our enemies would be harmed or even destroyed is not—and can never be—prayer in the name of Jesus.

To pray in the name of Jesus is to pray in ways (and for outcomes) that are consistent with the life and teaching of Jesus. Prayer that is grounded in a concern for justice, for love, for forgiveness, for compassion and mercy, for gentleness and non-violence, for healing and wholeness is prayer in Jesus' name—prayer that transforms both the one who prays and his or her relationships. It sets loose the energies of divine love in ways (and with outcomes) that are often quite surprising.

Many years ago, my daughter came home from a youth activity at church with a rubber bracelet around her wrist, emblazoned with the letters WWJD. What would Jesus do? I thought then, and still do, that wondering WWJD is a good practice not only for young people, but for adults of all ages as well. Spend time deliberately wondering what Jesus would do in the circumstances and relationships that fill our days and we will have a rather good idea of what to pray about.

But there is a prior question. Before we can ask WWJD we need to ask WDJD—what *did* Jesus do. And the only way to answer WDJD is to get to know him in the Gospels and so get to know God.

To pray in the name of Jesus is to join our will to the will of God, and so release the energies of divine and human love in making the world right. Prayer, understood rightly, leads to the transformation of human consciousness and the transformation of human action, which is what St. Paul had in mind when he wrote: "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17).

Prayer: May I always pray in your name by praying for the things that matter to you. Amen.