

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

By the Rev. Dr. Harry Wendt, Founder of Crossways International
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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

John 16:23-33

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Year C - Easter 6, Text: John 16:23-33 (or John 5:1-9)
Year C - Easter 6, Text: John 14:23-29 (or John 5:1-9)

Editor's Note: *Since Dr. Wendt did not write a commentary on this text, to fill this gap, this commentary was written by John B. King, Jr.*

As Christians, we often end our prayers, “in Jesus’ name. Amen.” In formal liturgical settings, we might say something a bit more elevated like: “This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.” However, in both cases the principle is the same. We pray to the Father through the mediation of the Son since it is through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus that we have access to the Father. In John 16:23-33, Jesus teaches His disciples to pray to the Father in His name.

Verses 16:23-27: While Jesus was physically present with His disciples, they asked Him directly for many things. However, the time was coming when they would ask the Father in His name. There were two reasons for this. First, Jesus was about to open their access to the Father through His death and resurrection. Second, due to His ascension, Jesus wouldn’t be present for the disciples to ask in the same way as before.

Although these verses explicitly refer to Jesus’ mediation of our prayers, there are several other aspects of Jesus’ mediation which are implicit in the text and which form the supporting context for His mediation of our prayers. First, since the Father cannot be Father without the Son, Jesus (as the Son) mediates our knowledge of God as Father. Without Jesus as son, God is a numinous, impersonal force. Second, since the Father sent His Son to die for us, Jesus’ work among us shows us the depths of the Father’s love. Third, since the world was made through the Word in the power of the Spirit, Jesus as Son mediates our existence as creatures who stand before the Father. Fourth, since Jesus died and rose in our place, He mediates our reconciliation with the Father as redeemed sinners. Finally, for all of these reasons, Jesus mediates our prayers to the Father.

In verse 27 Jesus tells His disciples that the Father loves them because they love Jesus and have faith that He was sent by the Father. Yet, at a deeper level, it is fundamentally the Father’s love that has produced the disciples’ love through the Son and the Spirit.

Verses 16:28-32: In verse 28 Jesus says to His disciples, “I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.” These words encompass His eternal pre-existence, His incarnation, His death, His resurrection, and His ascension.

Although the disciples do not yet understand all that these words entail, they finally express their faith in Jesus’ divinity as one who has come from the Father and is returning to the Father. In affirming their newfound faith, the disciples are riding high on Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem and His verbal victories over the religious leaders. Therefore, affirming His divinity seems to be the capstone of their experience with Jesus to date. At last, it seems that they finally understand who Jesus is and are ready to place their full faith in Him.

However, it is just then that Jesus throws them a curve-ball. He tells them that the events of the coming night will shatter their faith and scatter them away from Jesus. Each will flee to his own home, leaving Jesus alone with His captors. However, Jesus will not really be alone because the Father will be with Him.

The coming arrest and crucifixion of Jesus will shake their faith in His divinity for two reasons. First, it will seem incongruous to them that Jesus could suffer and die if He were truly God. Second, they will not yet understand why Jesus must suffer and die. They will not understand Jesus’ true mission. They will not understand why the Father sent Jesus into the world.

However, in telling them ahead of time that they will be scattered, Jesus is showing them that this too is within God’s plan and thus subject to Jesus’

foreknowledge. His impending death is no accident. Neither is their scattering from Jesus. So, by warning them in advance, Jesus is giving them a way to view the coming events as falling within God's plan. From this perspective, they will be able to strengthen their faith again as they integrate these events and make sense of them through later reflection.

Verse 16:33: Before going to the cross, Jesus finishes His discourse with the disciples through these final words: "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

In Jesus' coming arrest, trial, and crucifixion; His disciples will experience the tribulation of the world. However, in Jesus' resurrection they will know that He has overcome the world. Through this experience of death and resurrection, therefore, they will know that the tribulation of the world is part of God's plan, subject to His control, and thus a foil for His ultimate victory. Moreover, they will also know that in the midst of tribulation, God is the one who goes with them and works resurrection in the midst of death. This lesson will give them great confidence as they extend God's mission to the ends of the earth in the years ahead.