

JESUS PRAYS FOR US
Sermon for the 7th Sunday of Easter, 2019
John 17:20-26

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, John 17:20-26: ²⁰ **“I am not praying for these only but also for those who believe in Me through their Word, ²¹ that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I am in You. Let them also be in Us, that the world may believe that You have sent Me! ²² I have given them the glory that You have given Me, that they may be one, as We are one. ²³ I am in them, and You are in Me. Let them be brought to complete unity that the world may know that You have sent Me and that You have loved them as You have loved Me! ²⁴ Father, I desire that those also whom You have given to Me may be with Me where I am, that they may see My glory, which You have given to Me, because You have loved Me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵ Righteous Father, the world has not known You, but I have known You, and these have come to know that You have sent Me. ²⁶ I have made Your name known to them and shall make it known, that the love with which You have loved Me may be in them and that I may be in them.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today, we have before us the concluding portion of a prayer that Jesus prayed aloud for the benefit of His disciples, who were together in the upper room where they had celebrated the Passover, shortly before Jesus' impending death.

Jesus' prayer has three distinct parts. First, Jesus prays for Himself that through the upcoming ordeal of His suffering and death, He would bring glory to His Father and also to Himself. Second, Jesus prays for the disciples who are with Him, that they would be kept from the power of the evil one in this dark hour. He knows that what He was about to face will be a severe trial for them as well. They will be scattered and confused, not understanding what was happening or why - and so Jesus prays that none will be lost. He also prays that they will be kept safe from the false teachings of the world by the truth of the words He taught them. Then finally, in the section we hear from today, Jesus prays for His whole Church - that is, all those who down through the generations will come to faith in Him by hearing the truth of His teaching first given to His disciples.

Jesus' prayer is still the same prayer for His Church. Even as we speak, Jesus is at the right hand of God, interceding for us.¹ That means Jesus is presently speaking to His Father, asking that His requests on our behalf be answered. He will continue to do this until the time comes when He takes His whole Church home to be with Him in glory. That was His prayer when He spoke it many years ago, and it is still the same prayer spoken for us today.

So what is Jesus praying for His Church?

First, Jesus prays for the total unity of the Church. He says, ²⁰ **“I am not praying for these only but also for those who believe in Me through their Word, ²¹ that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I am in You.”**

The true Church is *never* divided. Although members are separated from one another by space and time, the true Christian Church is ever one. However, if we look all around us, at all the different denominations, it does appear that this is a prayer that has not at all been answered. Today there are more church bodies than ever before, all claiming to be Christian, and all claiming to have the one correct interpretation of the Scriptures and the truths that Jesus taught. Instead of unity in the church, we see nothing but division; and because of these divisions, we see all kinds of arguing, conflict and infighting. The Christian Church on earth seems to be a total mess.

That's the way we may see it, but remember, the one holy Christian and apostolic Church is an article of faith. It's something we believe in without being able to see. It's like Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament. We can't see it, but it is there. In fact, if one makes salvation depend on membership in, and communion with, the *visible* orthodox church, then the doctrine of justification by faith is overthrown. Jesus knows all those who are His. He knows every single person who trusts alone in Him, and they are indeed one with Him. Furthermore, on account of this, they are one with everyone else who is united to Jesus through faith - even though this unity cannot be seen. Even though there appears at times to be nothing but total chaos in the visible Christian Church, yet the Lord Jesus is still calling people to sacred union with Him by the power of His Gospel and His Holy Spirit. The Church lives by God's Word, even where that Word is proclaimed *along with error* - but error does not create faith. Error weakens the church, but insofar as the Gospel is proclaimed, the one holy Church is there. There are people who do have saving faith in churches where error is taught. So in this sense, the prayer of Jesus for unity in His Church is being answered.

Still, it is sad and unfortunate that *outwardly* the Christian Church is so divided and fragmented. Why is this so? The short answer is that Satan is very good at what he does - and what he does is deceive people. He injects his lies and falsehoods into the churches in an effort to steer people away from the saving Word of God's truth. Satan knows and understands that we are saved through faith alone - and that faith is founded upon belief in what Jesus Christ alone has accomplished for us, but he will bend things a bit so as to make man begin to question how he really does obtain eternal life.

¹ Romans 8:34

This is the reason we have so much division in the visible Church and so many different Christian denominations. To greater or lesser degrees, people have fallen for Satan's deceptions. For every truth that God asserts in His holy Word, Satan has dozens of ways to twist, turn, or bend it so that in the end, it's not exactly what God said or meant. You add up a few of those twists and turns and all of a sudden, you've got yourself a whole new denomination - which, I hasten to add, may very well still have the basic truths of the Gospel intact - but with just a bit more clutter and confusion that makes the saving Gospel a little harder to find and adhere to. That's why it is absolutely critical that we continue to seek God's truth straight from the Scriptures and keep it whole and intact.

Sadly, in our day, though, a lot of people think it's our job to bring unity to the Church on earth by negotiating, compromising, and "agreeing to disagree" on just what exactly God's truth is. This is perhaps Satan's greatest deception. If the question of what exactly is the truth comes between us, then let's just throw out the truth, join hands, and sing happy praise songs that really don't say anything at all. This way we won't be offending anybody. It's crazy - and yet the notion is so appealing because people believe that by doing so, they are answering the prayer of Jesus. However, it isn't our job to answer prayer. That's what God does. Our job is to be faithful to Him and the Word of truth He has given. God's truth is His. It's not ours to negotiate with. He gives it to us, and we must, with His help, keep it, confess it, and never compromise it.

Of course, someone will ask, "*With so many different claims to what the truth is out there, how can we be so sure that we have it right?*" That's a good question - provided it's not being used as a smokescreen to say that truth is relative or to deny that truth exists, or to say that even if it does exist it *cannot be known*. Those ideas are more of Satan's attempts designed to obscure the truth or to get us to avoid seeking it. However, if the question is serious, then the answer must be that we indeed ought to be sure of our salvation because God tells us so in His Word. That's what faith is all about! This is important because Jesus is the truth.² So if anyone says it's better to get along and pretend to be one big happy family apart from agreement in the truth, it's a false unity. It's a unity without Christ and therefore an unchristian unity. If anyone says the truth cannot be known, they are saying that Christ cannot be known. If this is the case, then I guess He completely wasted His time coming to earth and teaching all the things He did. If anyone says all we need are the bare essentials, so don't bother with the details, then they are saying that there are parts of Christ that we don't need.

These sorts of comments sound so pious and peaceful, but they are the lies of Satan straight from the pit of hell. Do not fall for them. Instead, recognise that the prayer of Jesus for unity in the Church is being answered - and that we become more and more a part of the answer by being united with Christ through increasing our faith in His Word.

Next, Jesus prays that having been made one with Him through faith, we would also be made perfect in love, and serve as witnesses of this love to the world. He says, "**Let them be brought to complete unity so that the world may know that You have sent Me, and that You have loved them as You have loved Me!**"

This is not some kind of warm and fuzzy feeling. No, it is God's love, a love that is complete, voluntary, and self-sacrificial in its devotion. Love gives. Love serves. Love sacrifices one hundred percent. God is love.³ God's very being is love. What that means is that the Father gives Himself fully and totally for the Son. He does this eternally. He surrenders the entirety of His own divine essence - and yet in doing so, He doesn't lose Himself; instead, He gains the Son. That's what Jesus is talking about when He says, "**You, Father, are in Me and I am in You.**" Two persons sharing the same divine being. Now Jesus prays that the same kind of relationship be extended to His Church. "**You, Father, are in Me and I am in You. Let them also be in Us.**" Jesus, the Son, the product of the Father's sacrificial love, now goes to the cross surrendering Himself completely for us, His Church.

The idea of our being perfected in love - the thing for which Jesus prays - means that He wants us to love one another in the same self-sacrificial way. Can you imagine what that would be like if everyone here today was truly loving toward each other as Christ is loving toward us? It's hard to think like this because we all hold back. We think (in our worldly, sinful way) that if we surrender ourselves for others, we lose. We would rather look out for ourselves and our own best interests. We only give to others what we think we can afford to without disturbing ourselves too much - and we measure our output with respect to others to see if we're doing our fair share. That's not love; it's selfishness. So, let's turn it around. What if everyone was giving one hundred percent of themselves for others? Then instead of each one looking out for himself, it would be all the others looking out for each other. By giving ourselves, we gain. Then, love grows infinitely.

The prayer of Jesus is that we continue to move toward realising this kind of perfect love now by confessing our sins, being cleansed of our guilt and selfishness, and opening our hearts and minds to receive more of His Spirit and truth. Then Christ dwelling in us will move us to be more loving to each other, and we shall begin to experience even now a foretaste of things to come. More than that: our love for one another would then serve as a witness to the rest of the world, "**that the world may know that You (the Father) have sent Me.**" Jesus did indeed come from the Father, bringing us His love. People outside of the Church should be able to look at us and see that there is something supernatural going on in terms of the love we display for one another. They ought to be able to see that we are not like the rest of the world, and so Jesus prays that our love be such that it does indeed bear witness to Him and to the truth of His claims.

All this is for better or for worse. Certainly, some people will be drawn to the light of Christ when they see our love for each other. Perhaps they'll think, "*There's obviously something powerful going on among them, and I want to be part of it.*" This may open them to

² John 14:5

³ 1 John 4:8

hearing the Gospel. However, it doesn't always work that way. In fact, most often, it does not. Bearing witness to Christ either by action or by word often makes us enemies of the world. Remember, the world saw the love of Jesus, and it rejected Him. It killed Him. Yet seeing Him die, even a pagan Roman centurion had to confess, "*Truly, this Man was the Son of God!*" (Matthew 27:54). We aren't told whether this centurion came to saving faith in Jesus, but it really doesn't matter. The point is that seeing the sacrificial love of Jesus led him to know the truth. Seeing our sacrificial love should lead people to the same truth whether they join with us or whether they choose to reject and persecute us. Most will do the latter - but even then our patience, our endurance, and our love and forgiveness for our enemies will continue to serve as a witness to the Lord Jesus, which brings us to a final petition Jesus makes for His Church when He prays, "**Father, I desire that those also whom You have given to Me may be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory, which You have given to Me, because You have loved Me before the foundation of the world.**"

This is Jesus' ultimate goal: that through whatever crosses and suffering may be appointed to us, we would pass with Him to His Father's home. At that point these prayers of Jesus for His Church will end; but until then we can be sure that He continues to stand as our own High Priest, pleading these requests before His Father who has promised to give us all things for the sake of His Son who loved us and gave Himself for us. We can be sure that God will answer these prayers.

So, may our prayers of thanks and praise ever rise to Him who, while on this earth, prayed this prayer for us. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Almighty God, our light and our salvation, we praise You for Your love and pity to all people. However, we praise You especially for giving us Your only Son Jesus Christ, who has ascended in triumph to Your right hand and sits at Your right hand with all other authority subordinated to Him. We thank You for crowning Him with glory and honour because of His obedient life, His innocent suffering, His redeeming death, and His resurrection. You have made Him king over all and Lord of all things for the benefit of the Church. Grant that we too may continue to confess Him as Lord of our hearts and our only Saviour.

Enable us through Your Holy Spirit to understand and know the things that belong to Your eternal kingdom. Comfort and strengthen us by Your heavenly truth. Stir our lives by Your Spirit, so that we may be ready to forgive others, love others as brothers and sisters, and be willing to help others generously and cheerfully. Keep us watchful and prayerful, so that we may not fall into temptation. If need be, give us the willingness to suffer for Jesus' sake. When testing comes, help us through Your Spirit to stand firm and steady, always busy in our work for You.

Renew all who serve in Your Church by Your gracious, powerful Spirit, that Christ may be consistently confessed, His cross uplifted, and His Gospel proclaimed as the only power that saves. Give grace and power to all pastors and missionaries, and warm love to all Your people, so that all may use their varied gifts to Your praise, through Jesus Christ.

Bless all parents, that they may give a good example to their children and encourage them in faith, godly living, daily study of Your Word, and a life of service to You and to all people.

Pour out Your Spirit on our nation, that our people may live in peaceful and pious homes and may serve You in all godliness and honour. Give Your blessing to all who work with mind or hand, that they may do their tasks honestly and conscientiously, and receive both satisfaction and a proper reward for their service. Give true wisdom to all in government, that they may perform their duties in ways that please You. Bless our countryside with favourable weather. Therefore, if it is Your will, please send rain again.

Hear the prayers of all in trouble and suffering. In the quiet hours of the night when there is no one to share their burdens of pain, loneliness, and worry, give them Your strength and hope, and assure them of Your love, power, and constant presence.

We give to You, heavenly Father, and your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, and to the Spirit of glory and of peace, all the praise for ever and ever. Amen.

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 1:12-26

¹² Then they went back to Jerusalem from what was called “the Mount of Olives,” which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away.

¹³ When they entered, they went to the second-floor room where they were staying. There were Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew; James, the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas, the son of James. ¹⁴ With one mind these all kept praying together, along with the women, Mary the mother of Jesus and His brothers.

¹⁵ In those days Peter stood up among the disciples (the number of persons all together was about a hundred and twenty) and he said, ¹⁶ “Men, brothers, the passage of Scripture that the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David about Judas had to be fulfilled. He served as a guide for the men who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷ For Judas had been counted as one of us and had received his portion in this ministry. ¹⁸ With the reward that he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field. He fell headlong and burst open in the middle and all his intestines poured out. ¹⁹ All those who live in Jerusalem have heard about it, and so that piece of land is called ‘Akel-Dama’ in their language, that is, ‘Field of Blood.’ ²⁰ For Scripture has said in the book of Psalms: ‘Let his home be deserted and let there be no one who lives in it!’ and ‘Let someone else take his position of oversight!’ ²¹ Therefore, there must be one of the men who have accompanied us all through the time when the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² one of these men who have been with us, beginning with the baptism of John until the day when Jesus was taken up from us, to be a witness with us of His resurrection.”

²³ They proposed two men: Joseph, called “Barsabbas,” who was also known as “Justus,” and Matthias. ²⁴ Then they prayed, “Lord, You know the hearts of all. Show which of these two You have chosen ²⁵ to take over the position of this ministry and office of apostle, from which Judas has transgressed, to go to his own place!”

²⁶ They cast lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias, and he was chosen by vote to be added to the eleven apostles.

Revelation 22:1-20

¹ Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, coming out from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ² In the middle of its street and on each side of the river there was the tree of life. It produces twelve crops of fruit, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree serve to heal the nations. ³ There will be no curse any longer. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and His servants will serve Him. ⁴ They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ There will be no night any longer, and people do not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will shine on them, and they will reign for ever and ever.

⁶ He said to me: “These Words are faithful and genuine. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent His angel to show His servants the things that must soon take place. ⁷ Look! I am coming soon. Blessed is he who keeps the Words of the prophecy of this book!”

⁸ I, John, am the one who have heard and seen these things. When I had heard and seen them, I fell to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. ⁹ However, he told me: “See that you do not do that! I am a fellow-servant of yours and of your fellow-Christians, the prophets and those who keep the Words of this book. Worship God!”

¹⁰ Then he told me: “Do not seal up the Words of the prophecy of this book! For the time is near. ¹¹ Let the wrongdoer still do wrong, let the filthy person still be filthy! Let the righteous person still do right, and let the holy person still be holy!

¹² “See! I am coming soon, and My reward is with Me, to repay everyone according to what he has done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. ¹⁴ Blessed are those who wash their robes that they may have the right to the tree of life and may enter through the gates into the city! ¹⁵ Outside are the dogs, the people who practise witchcraft, sin sexually, murder and worship idols and everyone who loves and practises falsehood. ¹⁶ I, Jesus, have sent My angel to give this testimony to you for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright Morning Star.”

¹⁷ The Spirit and the bride also say, “Come!” Let the one who hears this also say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty also come! Let the one who desires it take the water of life as a free gift! ¹⁸ I testify to everyone who hears the Words of this prophetic book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues that have been written in this book. ¹⁹ If anyone takes away any of the Words of this prophetic book, God will take away his part in the tree of life, in the Holy City and in the things that have been written in this book.”

²⁰ He who is testifying to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.”

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

John 17:20-26

²⁰ “I am not praying for these only but also for those who believe in Me through their Word, ²¹ that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I am in You. Let them also be in Us, that the world may believe that You have sent Me! ²² I have given them the glory that You have given Me, that they may be one, as We are one. ²³ I am in them, and You are in Me. Let them be brought to complete unity that the world may know that You have sent Me and that You have loved them as You have loved Me! ²⁴ Father, I desire that those also whom You have given to Me may be with Me where I am, that they may see My glory, which You have given to Me, because You have loved Me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵ Righteous Father, the world has not known You, but I have known You, and these have come to know that You have sent Me. ²⁶ I have made Your name known to them and shall make it known, that the love with which You have loved Me may be in them and that I may be in them.”