

HOLY FATHER, KEEP THEM IN YOUR NAME
Sermon for the 7th Sunday of Easter, 2020
John 17:1-11

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 the Gospel, John 17:1-11: ¹ **Jesus spoke these Words, looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may glorify You! ² For You have given Him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom You have given Him. ³ This is eternal life, to know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent. ⁴ I have glorified You on the earth by finishing the work that You have given Me to do. ⁵ Now, Father, glorify Me at Your side with the glory that I had with You before the world existed!**

⁶ **“I have made Your name known to the people whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your Word. ⁷ Now they know that all things that You have given Me come from You, ⁸ because I have given them the Words that You have given Me, and they have received them and learned the truth that I have come from You and have believed that You have sent Me. ⁹ I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me. For they are Yours. ¹⁰ All that are Mine are Yours, and what are Yours are Mine, and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹ I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name that You have given Me, that they may be one, as We are one!**

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

Dear friends in Christ,

Today’s Gospel reading is a portion of the “High Priestly Prayer” that Jesus spoke on the night of His arrest. This prayer has been called Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer because with it Jesus functioned as high priest and interceded to the Father for the disciples first and then for all believers. It was a prayer such as only the Son of God could pray - truly the Lord’s prayer! Very soon He would be subjected to unimaginable suffering as He would give His life as an offering for sin.

This is one of the few accounts of the *actual words of Jesus* in prayer. The Gospel accounts tell us that prayer was a regular part of Jesus’ life, but most of the time, they do not tell us the actual words that He prayed.¹ However, at this time, just before Jesus took the disciples to Gethsemane, He wanted them to hear the words of His prayer, and the Holy Spirit inspired John to record them for us.

In this prayer, we hear Jesus in His state of humiliation. Although He is both God and man in one person, yet He did not use His Divine power for His own benefit. As you listen to this prayer, you hear the prayer of a man who is under great stress. He knows what is coming. He knows that the next 24 hours will hold shame, torture, and death. In His state of humiliation, He will not use His divine power to reduce the anguish of the suffering and death that is coming. At the same time, His words tell us that He is fully aware of His divine nature. He will speak of the divine results of His suffering. He will also speak of His eternal existence in the presence of God the Father.

The words of our text today is only the first half of the prayer Jesus prayed. Nevertheless, it is useful to look at the *overall organisation* of the entire prayer before we get into the details of what we heard this morning.

Jesus began by praying for Himself and the mission set before Him. Jesus knew that the time had come for the culmination of His ministry and the fulfillment of His purpose, namely, the reconciliation of the world, the imparting of redemption to all believers.

Second, Jesus prayed for His disciples. He prayed that the Father would strengthen and keep them, not only during the next few days of grief for their dead teacher, but also for the years of persecution as they proclaimed the Gospel.

Finally, in the part of the prayer that we did not hear today, Jesus prayed for us. He prayed, “*I am not praying for these only but also for those who believe in Me through their Word*” (John 17:20). This part of the prayer is for all

¹ e.g. Luke 5:16

New Testament believers. For it is by the proclamation of the Gospel that these people come to believe. It is by the proclamation of the Gospel that you and I have come to believe.

John begins by telling us that Jesus **looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come.”** The Gospel according to John speaks frequently of this hour. At the wedding in Cana Jesus had a conversation with His mother. *“When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother told Him, “They have no more wine.”⁴ Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come”* (John 2:3-4). At another time, He offended some people with His teaching. *“Therefore, they tried to arrest Him, but no one laid his hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come”* (John 7:30). Again: *“He spoke these Words at the treasury while He was teaching in the Temple, and yet no one arrested Him, because His hour had not yet come”* (John 8:20). Now, in this prayer, Jesus acknowledges that the hour *has come*.

The hour Jesus speaks of is His appointment with the work that will earn the forgiveness of sins for all people. Jesus knows full well about the shame, suffering, and death that waits for Him. He knows full well the wrath of God that He will endure as He takes our punishment onto Himself, and so it is that He begins, **“Father, the hour has come.”**

Jesus continued His prayer, and said, **“Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may glorify You!”** In praying for God the Father to glorify Him, Jesus was praying for the successful outcome of His work of salvation. His greatest glory would come as He hung on the cross. Jesus prayed for the strength to submit to death on the cross, where there would be victory over sin and Satan, and His glory would become manifest in His resurrection and ascension and made full in heaven. It would follow close upon the darkness of the cross. When the disciples saw Jesus alive after the grave, they saw that glory, *“the glory of the Father’s only Son.... full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14). Through Jesus the glory of the Father also shone brightly. All that the Son did was for the glory of the Father.

But what is the benefit of Christ’s glory on the cross? Jesus prayed for that as well as He prayed, **“Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may glorify You! ² For You have given Him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom You have given Him. ³ This is eternal life, to know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.”** The glory of Christ on the cross gives eternal life to all who know God, but not just any god. Eternal life is for those who know the only true God who sent Jesus Christ to suffer the glory of the cross. It is not enough to say, *“I believe in God.”* There are many religions that believe in god. The true religion knows the only true God, and Jesus Christ who was sent from God the Father.

There is also comfort in this prayer for those who are afraid that their faith is not strong enough, that they are not sure of their salvation. Throughout this prayer, Jesus speaks of the disciples as those whom the Father **had given Him**. The disciples *were not* responsible for their faith. The disciples *did not* attach themselves to Jesus of their own will. Instead, God chose them. Jesus prayed for them as a gift to Him from God the Father. Likewise, God has chosen us before the foundation of the world.² It is God who chooses those who receive Christ’s gift of eternal life.

After Jesus had asked for strength for His glorification on the cross, He acknowledged the work that He already had completed. He prayed, **“⁴ I have glorified You on the earth by finishing the work that You have given Me to do. ⁵ Now, Father, glorify Me at Your side with the glory that I had with You before the world existed! ⁶ “I have made Your name known to the people whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your Word. ⁷ Now they know that all things that You have given Me come from You, ⁸ because I have given them the Words that You have given Me, and they have received them and learned the truth that I have come from You and have believed that You have sent Me.”** The cross is the crowning glory of Jesus Christ, but the cross would be no good if Jesus did not also lead a perfect life. The blood that He shed on the cross must be innocent. He lived a perfect life under the law.

Part of that perfect life involved the proclamation of the words that the Father had given Him to proclaim. The saving work of Jesus Christ does no good if no one proclaims it. It is when the Holy Spirit works through the proclamation of the Gospel that God brings people to faith in Jesus so that they receive the gifts that He has for them. Jesus conducted a ministry of teaching and healing. He proclaimed the words that the Father had given Him. Jesus had finished the work the Father had sent Him to do before He endured the glory of the cross. He had prepared everything according to the Father’s will, now it was time for Him to submit passively to the cross.

² Ephesians 1:4

As Jesus acknowledged the completion of the task of proclamation, He transitioned into prayer for His disciples. He prayed, "...I have given them the Words that You have given Me, and they have received them and learned the truth that I have come from You and have believed that You have sent Me. ⁹ I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me. For they are Yours. ¹⁰ All that are Mine are Yours, and what are Yours are Mine, and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹ I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name that You have given Me, that they may be one, as We are one!"

With these words, Jesus prayed specifically for those whom the Father had chosen. He knew that they would endure incredible grief over the next few days. He, their teacher and their friend, would be arrested, hung on a cross, and buried in a tomb. He would not be with them to care for them as He had before. Jesus did not want them to be alone at this time.

Jesus was also looking ahead to the time after His resurrection. He knew that He would soon ascend into heaven. Again, He would not be with them to care for them as He had before. After Jesus ascended, they would continue to endure the attacks of this sinful world. As we heard Peter write in our Second Lesson for today, "*Your enemy, the Devil, is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour*" (1 Peter 5:8), so he would be looking for every opportunity to exploit and defeat them. There was a lot stacked against them. They needed protection, so Jesus prayed for the Father to keep them unified - not just in any unity, but in the unity of God's name. Jesus prayed, that in the name of the Father, they "**may be one, as We (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) are one!**"

With these words, we come to the end of the Gospel reading for this day. Jesus' prayer continues to the end of the chapter, and I encourage you to take the time today to read the entire prayer.

Jesus had fulfilled His ministry of teaching and healing. Everything was in place. The time had come for Him to endure the glory of the cross. He prayed that God the Father would sustain Him so that He would glorify the Father and the Father would glorify Him. By enduring the glory of the cross, He would give eternal life to those whom the Father had given to Him. He prayed that the Father would watch over His disciples while He hung on the cross and laid in the grave. He also prayed that the Father would watch over His disciples as, at the time of the ascension, His presence with them changed from the visible to the sacramental. As we came to the ending of today's reading, we heard Jesus pray for the unity of the church in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus went on to pray specifically for us as He prayed, "*I am not praying for these only but also for those who believe in Me through their Word*" (John 17:20). He continues to pray for us to this very day.

Of course, God answered Jesus' prayer. Jesus did indeed endure the glory of the cross to earn eternal life for you, me, and all people. Jesus opened the way to eternal life by rising from the dead. God poured out the Holy Spirit to call us by the Gospel and enlighten us with His gifts. Eternal life is already ours in Christ. Although our understanding of God's unity is imperfect in this life, we are unified in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

When we leave this world, God will fully glorify us with Him forever in heaven. There we shall finally see and fully partake of the glory of the Father, not as a reward but as a promise, an eternal inheritance for all believers. Until that day, we pray that God would use us to glorify His name in this world in all that we do. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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

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.

1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-11

¹² Dearly loved people, do not be astonished at the fiery ordeal among you, by which you are being tested, as though something strange were happening to you! ¹³ However, rejoice in as far as you share in Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be very glad when His glory is revealed! ¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God is resting on you. ¹⁵ Of course, none of you should suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal or one who meddles in the affairs of others! ¹⁶ However, if anyone suffers as a Christian, he should not be ashamed but should glorify God for that name!

¹⁷ For it is time for the judgment to begin with the household of God. However, if it begins with us, what will be the end for those who refuse to listen to the Good News of God? ¹⁸ If it is hard for a righteous

person to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and sinful person? ¹⁹ Therefore, those who are suffering according to the will of God should commit their souls to the faithful Creator, as they continue to do good! ...

^{5:6} Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the right time! ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on Him! For He cares for you.

⁸ Be self-controlled and alert! Your enemy, the Devil, is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Be strong in your faith and resist him, knowing that your fellow-Christians in the world are undergoing the same kinds of sufferings! ¹⁰ After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you in Christ Jesus to His eternal glory, will Himself make you complete, make you firm, make you strong and give you a good foundation. ¹¹ To Him be the power for ever! Amen.

John 17:1-11

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