

May 12, 2024 Seventh Sunday of Easter

Introduction to themes for the season and the day

John's Gospel emphasizes how Jesus both came from God (whom he calls Father) and returned to God when he ascended after his resurrection. This past Thursday Christians observed Ascension Day and with it Jesus' words that he accomplished what he set out to do. Looking back at the prayer he prays before his arrest, we can see Jesus' concern for the ongoing health of his community and for its mission go into the world and bear witness to God's unshakeable love.

Prayer of the Day

Gracious and glorious God, you have chosen us as your own. By the powerful name of Christ you protect us from evil. By your Spirit transform us and your beloved world, that we may find our joy in your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Gospel

John 17:6-19

6'I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. 9I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. 10All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

11And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. 12While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. 13But now I am

coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. 14I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 15I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. 16They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

17Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Sermon

Appreciating Jesus' prayer for his followers requires a long running start. John's Gospel echoes Genesis taking us back to "in the beginning" where God's love and exuberance tame chaos and create a world. The divine will of God, called "the Word" becomes human and lives in the very world God created. Jesus would tell a rabbi who visits one night that God so loved the world that God was willing to gamble it all, sending Jesus, the embodiment of God into the world to bless and save it.

With a run up like that, it's hard to believe Jesus prayer is an abandonment of the world. Yet like many things, it's complicated. The world the disciples aren't really connected with is one of empires, systems and schemes that enrich only a few at the expense of everyone else.

Besides a long run-up, we need a long look back. Jesus sends his followers into a world that's both wounded and wounding. Remember, we're looking backward and remembering Jesus' prayer

AFTER he was raised from the dead

AFTER breathing the Spirit of God upon his followers, just as he promised he would do

and AFTER he ascended.

What if Jesus prays for more than a few people of one time and place, but for all of us? Jesus sends the Spirit of God to be among us and within us too. We bear witness to that very thing when we recite our creeds as we are doing during the Easter Season.

We affirm belief in the Holy Spirit and in so doing we recall what the Spirit is up to in the so-called Third Article (Gasp! Are we back in catechism class?). The Spirit gathers people, nurtures them and sends them into this world that God loves. That's what we mean when we say we believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic church. Being church together we experience baptism and the forgiveness of sins—as in we experience abundant life now. And being church together we also look for the resurrection of the dead and an even more abundant life in the world to come.

In the here and now, Jesus prayer for us is that we are one as he is one with the one he calls Father. The essence of oneness is love...the sort where Jesus loves us to the completion of all God has in mind. The essence of unity in love is that we love others as Jesus commanded us to do. We love because God loved us first.