

June 1, 2014

Jesus Prays to God for Us

John 17:1-11

A part of the life of every youth group and all youth ministers is prayer. The group prays for many reasons but two are of primary importance. The first important reason is to teach the youth that God is present. God is present with them at all times. Therefore, the youth can pray to God at all times. The second reason is to encourage the youth to pray silently and aloud. As they pray, the prayers are not only for their needs, but the needs of others. It is very easy for a teenager to pray to God for help on a test or an exam especially if they haven't studied for it well. It is very different for many youth to realize that they can pray for the benefit of others. It is a type of prayer we call intercessory prayer. Too often they believe saying that type of prayer has to be done by a minister. The minister could be ordained, like a deacon, priest or bishop. Or the person could be a layperson like a your minister or youth advisor. In any case, intercessory prayer, prayers for others, is supposed to be done by someone with pastoral authority.

In one respect, it is really strange that this concept of prayer develops. As children we were taught to pray. Do we remember the prayer, "Now I lay me down to sleep?" This prayer always ends with "God Bless" and the child is encouraged to offer a list of names. Somehow that concept is lost by many youth by their teenage years. I suppose for many teens they feel insecure about the way they pray. They are afraid others might make fun of them. Yet, most of us overcome this feeling to some extent as adults and we will start to pray for others. We will offer intercessory prayer for the needs of those around us, our family, and our friends in the community.

Today's reading from John is the beginning of a prayer. In fact, for many years the 17th chapter of John has been referred to as "Jesus' high priestly prayer". We only hear the first eleven verses of this prayer today. In these eleven verses there are three things of which we should take note. Now, I am aware that for many years the church taught seminarians that a sermon should have three points and a prayer. I assure you that I am not simply following that old formula. There are three points that we should hear and digest for our own understanding of this beautiful prayer.

First of all, Jesus addresses this prayer to God on behalf of the faith community. He prays for those who have been with him and are now with him until the end. Jesus says, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life; that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." In these few sentences, Jesus has glorified God and he returns those whom God has given him back to God. He entrusts the immediate care of the faith community and the future community to God. God will take care of them. It is important to note that Jesus does not entrust the care of the community to the community itself. The future of the community is not dependent on the actions or words of the present community. The future of the Christian community is in

God's very capable hands. In fact, during this last hour with his disciples, Jesus doesn't give them instructions on what they are to do or how they are to be in his absence. Instead Jesus' first action in the prayer is to entrust the future of the community to the only one who can lead the community forward, God the Father. God's capable and loving hand will guide the disciples; will guide all future followers of Christ, as they move forward without the physical presence of Jesus with them.

Secondly, and this point is very closely related to the first, the community's life rests and depends on God's care. Too often we believe that the Church depends on our efforts alone. Yes, we have to live and work for God's glory in the world. However, we are only a small part of the Christian Church. The Christian Church doesn't belong to us. The Christian Church belongs to God. We are the workers in the vineyard. We are not the owners. If we notice Jesus doesn't offer any advice or suggestions as to how the Church is to live its' life. In fact, there is no pragmatic advice on how to live in unity as the community of God. Please look at the Christian Church. We are so divided over so many aspects of worship and living the Christian life. The proof is in the number of denominations we have around the world. If we were responsible for the Church's entire welfare, then we shouldn't be so divided. However, we are divided simply because we can't foresee the future of the Church. We have our own agendas, our own interpretations and our own beliefs. If we are in charge then we are lost. God is in control. The sooner we grasp the absolute truth the better off we will be.

The final point of these three verses is one of great hope and comfort. Jesus is leaving the disciples. While he will rise again, he will not be returning to start again what he has just finished. He will be returning to the heavenly places. So he prays for the disciples, he prays for us, with these beautiful words, "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name-the name you gave me-so that they may be one as we are one." Jesus prays for the protections of all those past, present and future in this world in which we live. Jesus knows this world is a harsh place. The world challenges us daily to turn away from God and seek eternal life in temporal things. If we want to live in unity with Christ then we are called to recognize that our faith is in God and in God alone. If we truly want to be one with Christ, then we are called to be like Christ.

The question then is, "How can we be like Christ?" We are like Christ when we seek God's will for our lives and then attempt to live into that will. We turn away from our own wants and desires and we focus instead on God's will for us. If we want to begin to understand the fullness of life that God has for us, then we live each day bringing glory to God our Father. Jesus set the example. Every time he reached out in compassion to the hurting he gave glory to God. Every time he taught the people about God's love for them, he gave glory to God. Every time he held a child in his arms, he gave glory to God. Every step he took with his disciples, every meal he ate with them, and every night he slept next to them on the journey, he was giving glory to God. Finally, when it was time, he offered himself, knowing that he was fulfilling God's will for us, on the cross. His entire life is the greatest example of giving glory to God the Father. We are called to follow his perfect example to the best of our ability. The most incredible promise that we have received from Jesus is that God will be with us on our journey.

So in these eleven verses we see how marvelous it is to be a part of the community of believers in Christ our Lord. We see that the care of the Christian community is in God's capable hands. Since Jesus is no longer physically with us, God the Father will lead the community through the power of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, the life of the Christian community in the present and in the future belongs to God. We are not in control of the existence of the Church. God is. Finally the protection of each disciple of Jesus is in the hands of God. Jesus the Son and God the Father are one. As Jesus was present in the lives of his disciples so God the Father is present in our lives today. We have a loving and compassionate God who only wants the best for us in our lives. How can we not do everything we can to glorify God the Father in our day? Amen.