

Seventh Sunday of Easter, May 13, 2018, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 17:11b-19

"A Truly Special Prayer"

Today is a special day for each of us – as we celebrate the woman who we call Mom; the woman who raised you; the woman who gave birth to you. We celebrate ALL women today. Ladies, we owe you so much. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts – this is your day.

In today's Holy Gospel – Jesus' prayer for His church and it is a prayer unlike any other prayer and it shows us what we are to be working on to be a great church –to be truly the Body of Christ. This is a triumphant prayer that Jesus prayed, and He must have been in agony knowing that it was on the night before He died. It is important to know that just before Jesus' prayer in today's Holy Gospel are words He spoke words given to us in John 16, giving us this assurance, "*I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*" (John 16:33)

When Jesus comes to His Father in this prayer for His church; He is coming in confidence; expressing His confidence in God the Father. Jesus makes a request for the church and is constantly in prayer with God the Father, asking for something very special for us.

Jesus also expresses confidence for you and me. In verses 20 and 21, which immediately follow today's Holy Gospel Jesus prays this: "*I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.*" (John 17:20-21) It is truly the gift that keeps on giving. The gift that Jesus gave to His disciples – they in turn gave to the world in the Name of Jesus. It is the faith that we have received from those disciples, handed down time and time again, the untarnished faith in the Word of God that as Jesus said – is true. It is unchangeable, it is un-twistable, and it is incorruptible. Culture doesn't change the Word of God – the Word of God should change culture! Jesus has this confidence that expresses that we will carry out His message to completion and He prays that the Father will help us. Two Thousand years ago, Jesus prayed for this church, for all the churches that exist today. Isn't that incredibly awesome?

All of this happened after Jesus asked His disciples at Caesarea Philippi in the northern part of Israel; and Jesus asked them "*who do people say that I am?*" They gave a whole bunch of answers – but then Jesus asked them "***who do you say that I am?***" Peter jumped forward, like he would always do, saying, "*You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God!*" After that Jesus prayed for the church and He said this, "*You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church.*" Now there is a lot of confusion about this because a lot of people think that Peter is the Rock. Well, yes, his name Peter (Petra) means rock, but I want you to hear this: the rock that Jesus was talking about was not Peter – but instead it was the words that Peter spoke: "*You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God!*" and on **that rock** Jesus said I will build the church and "***the gates of hell will not prevail against it.***" Do you understand what I am

saying? The fact that Jesus is the Messiah and is the Son of God – on that truth everything is built in Christianity, everything is built!

There is a two-fold purpose in Jesus' High Priestly prayer: it is unique, and it is special. Jesus is praying that He has fulfilled the Father's purpose saying, Father, what you have given Me to do I have done. In verse 4 Jesus says, "*I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do.*" In verse 6 "*I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.*" In verse 8 "*for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me.*" In verse 12 Jesus says, "*While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.*" That was Judas, the betrayer, who sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. We read about that this morning in our New Testament lesson from the Acts of the Apostles. The Word told us about how he died and how he was replaced by God. The man who would fulfill his word was Matthias. In verse 14 Jesus tells the Father "*I have given them Your word.*" And in verse 18 "*As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.*" Jesus goes on in verse 22 "*The glory which You have given Me I have given to them.*" Jesus continues in verse 26 "*I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.*" Precious, precious gifts!

Eight times in this prayer, Jesus goes to the Father and says that I have done what you have asked me to do. I believe that there is another purpose in His prayer. Jesus asks that the work He started will be continued in His church; He asked that the work that He had begun and went to the Cross and died for - would continue years down the road and that it would be actively happening. This is a truly great prayer, and in it **Jesus comes to the Father asking 5 things on our behalf.**

1. Jesus prays that you and I as the church will sense the glory of God. Jesus is asking the Father that those in the church will sense, feel, experience, and know His glory. Have you ever sat in church and gotten this "warm" feeling? I am talking about "an inner warmth." John Wesley spoke about that warmth that came over him and changed and transformed him: The Holy Spirit. The word glory - means the visible manifestation of the power and the glory and the radiance and beauty of God Himself. Manifestation means it is happening; it is unfolding and happening before you, you are seeing it and experiencing it. The word glory is unbelievable. Jesus was praying to the Father and asking that His followers might see manifested in their midst His splendor, His power, and His radiance. Jesus wants people in the years to come to continue to feel and sense His presence.

Ironically, next Sunday is fifty days after Passover – Pentecost. I am going to ask you all a favor – wear something RED next Sunday. I will, and we will be decked out with as much red as we can, because the Holy Spirit comes on the Day of Pentecost, and we will be in Acts chapter 2, remembering the warmth that they received – tongues of fire – and

Seventh Sunday of Easter, May 13, 2018, Year B

I pray that the Holy Spirit visits us in a special way next Sunday as we celebrate Pentecost. Don't forget the red!

2. Jesus prayed that we would not only sense the presence of God, but that **we would follow the Word of God**; the unchangeable, incorruptible Word of God. His Word is complete and NEVER to be changed! When the disciples received the word of God it gave them meaning for life. They understood that Jesus truly came from the Father in heaven and gave them life. When we get into the Word we begin to have meaning in life and then when you understand the Word comes alive. I have seen, on Wednesday nights when we have Bible study, how some people's eyes are opened, getting really excited about what God has to tell us. It becomes personal. In verses 17 and 19, Jesus teaches that the Word of God sanctifies us. He says, "*Sanctify them in the truth, Your word is truth*" "*That they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.*" It is the word of God that satisfies us, establishes us and we need to be in the Word of God and be bathed in the Holy Spirit as we read it.
3. Jesus prayed that we would become united in the love of God. When you get the body united in love, then God begins to do some great things. We are seeing great things being done right in the midst of *this* body – St. Andrew's Anglican Church. Just look around at what God has done, this year through us, and how this church has been transformed. I can't tell you the number of comments I heard on Tuesday during the greeting time after Robert Tift's funeral. People were just commenting about how beautiful it is, and these were some people that used to go to Saint Paul's here, commenting about how absolutely magnificent this church is today, and I said – come back in six months. God is not done! Some of you know what that means.
4. Jesus prayed that the church would begin to move in the mission of the Father. The word sanctify means not only to consecrate, to make holy, but it means to equip – to give you the tools that you need to do a job. What is our mission? To seek and save those who are lost.
5. Jesus prayed that we would experience the joy of God. I have been to churches where people just sit there – and I want to say - why aren't you happy? God loves you! You don't have to sit there laughing or giggling, but it is OK to smile in church! It really is – and I try to give that example – because I am so happy that God has saved me, and that God has brought me here to be with my St. Andrew's family. What a blessing that is! Jesus said in verse 13, "*I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of joy within them.*" Let me ask you a question this morning? What gives a congregation the joy of God? Is it the First Holy Church of Dull? When we sense the presence of God, when we follow the Holy Word of God – and don't try to make it say something that it doesn't, when we are united in the Love of God and when we go forth in the mission of God, then as a body of believers we begin to experience the joy of God. Y'all ought to see your faces during the "Peace," when the family gets to be the family. This is a unique and wonderful place to be. God has brought us here – for His purpose. That is what Jesus prayed for, and I

pray that that would be all of our prayers as well.

Jesus is going away, and He is very much aware that the disciples are at risk. The world, which hates them as it hated Him, will threaten and abuse them. In the case of the 11 - they kill them. They tried to kill John by boiling him in oil in Rome, but it did not work, and so he was sent to the Island of Patmos because God had a plan – He was going to give him the Revelation of Our Lord Jesus Christ – all about the “last days” – the end times. The world hates the disciples and, in many ways, hates us. Have you ever seen the way people talk about Christians on TV? It is usually in jest, snarling, making jokes – which is sad, but we know we can expect that.

The disciples, like us, don't belong to the world, but we are sent into it, and we need protecting! That's what this prayer is about. What is now needed, is for us to be kept from being pulled back into 'the world' with all its wickedness and rebellion. During Jesus' public ministry, Jesus looked after His disciples, and now He was going to be turning that protecting over to God the Father and the Holy Spirit, to be teaching and leading them, like the shepherd with His sheep. He mentions, with sorrow, the loss of one sheep, recognizing that it was inevitable. The Bible had said it would happen. Now, because Jesus is coming to the Father, He is entrusting them to the Father, who will continue the work of keeping them safe. Jesus addresses the Father as 'holy' and declares that He is '*setting Himself apart*' so that His disciples too may be 'set apart'.

The word for 'setting apart' is basically the same as the word for 'holy.' In the Old Testament (and the New Testament) when the word 'holy' was brought about it brought to mind one thing - the Temple. That was the holy place, the place where the holy God had promised to live. It referred to the Holy of Holies, the innermost place, where the high priest would go once a year to make atonement for the people on Yom Kippur. The high priest had to go through special ceremonies of 'consecration', to be 'set apart' so that he could enter into the presence of the Holy God and pray there for his people. In exactly the same way, Jesus is declaring that He has been all along, 'set apart', and 'consecrated' for God's exclusive service. Now, as our high priest, Jesus is asking the Father to preserve His people – us - from evil, from the tricks and traps of 'the world'. He wants them to be His holy people in the truest sense.

What Jesus has already done for His people is to 'keep' them in the Father's name and to give them His Word. When He now entrusts us to the Father, this won't mean a sudden change, like a mother entrusting her children to someone they've never heard of or seen before. Jesus has already taught them, how to behave appropriately for the Father's house. In praying for them now, He is praying that what He has begun, the Father will gloriously complete – through His church. What were some of Jesus' last words on the cross? “It is Finished” In being so – the Temple Veil was torn in two – from top to bottom – and at that point the Holy Spirit was coming; coming to open our hearts. No longer was God to be accessed through the Holy of Holies – but through the Holy Spirit – a precious gift that we will celebrate next week on the Day of Pentecost, wearing red. You don't have to be totally in red – but a little red and you will look great.

Seventh Sunday of Easter, May 13, 2018, Year B

This is a serious prayer. It is not unlike the prayer that a mother prays over and for her children. It is one of the most serious things Jesus ever said. That's why, down deep, it is also among the most joyful and hopeful. Pray it with awe, with joy and with thankfulness, filled with gladness and with thanksgiving. We truly have much to be thankful for!