

Seventh Sunday of Easter, May 17, 2015, Year B

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 17:11b-19

***"Jesus' High Priestly Prayer"***

We are blessed today not only by the announcement by your Vestry – but like last week we have visitors – visitors from the “north” – from Tonawanda – North Tonawanda – Tom and MJ Brzeczowski. They are visiting from St. Bartholomew's, where MJ serves on the vestry – and where Marilyn and I spent 9 years. We are grateful to have them visiting today – as members of our “extended family.”

In speaking of the church, as in our prayer – we pray for the physical plant that God would protect this place since it now belongs to St. Andrew's Anglican Church. We are also praying for the people in the pews – and the ones that God is going to deliver tomorrow, and the next Sunday – whether they are visitors or maybe God is leading them by the Holy Spirit to be a part of this Parish Family. Jesus prayed for the Church in His special prayer, not like any other prayer (in John 17) and it gives us some points as to what we are supposed to be doing, what we are to be working on to be a great church – the Body of Christ.

This is a triumphant prayer – on the night before Jesus died. Just prior to Jesus' words in today's Holy Gospel from John chapter 16, Jesus said, *"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."*

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

It is wonderful how Jesus expresses confidence for you and me. In verses 20 and 21, the verses immediately following today's Holy Gospel Jesus prays: *"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 the gift that keeps on giving. The gift that Jesus gave to the disciples – they gave to the world in the Name of Jesus. It is the faith that we have received from those disciples, the untarnished faith in the Word of God that as Jesus said – is true. It is unchangeable, it is un-twistable. Culture doesn't change the Word – the Word should change culture! Jesus has this confidence that expresses that we will carry out His message to fruition and He prays that the Father will help us. Two Thousand years ago, Jesus looked and prayed for this church, for all the churches that exist today. Isn't that incredibly awesome?

Jesus prayed for His church all those years ago and He said in Caesarea Philippi, after He asked His disciples *"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, and he said *"You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God!"* After that Jesus prayed for the church and He said *"You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church."* Now 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.***”

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, who we read about this morning in our New Testament lesson, and who was replaced by 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.*” 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. But I believe that there is another purpose in this 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 know – (the AC was out – and everyone was warm)) I am talking about “an inner warmth.” John Wesley spoke about that warmth that came over him and changed him, transformed him: the Holy Spirit. The word glory in the Greek comes from the word “*doxa*” from which we have the word doxology from which we sing “Praise God from whom all blessings flow.” And that word glory means the visible manifestation of the power and the glory and the radiance and beauty of God, Himself. Jesus was praying to the Father and asking that His followers might see manifested in their midst His splendor, His power, and His radiance. That the people in the years to come will continue to feel and sense His presence.
2. Jesus prayed that we would not only sense the presence of God, but that **we would follow the Word of God.** He prayed that we would become followers of the Word of God. The unchangeable Word of God. Editing is finished – it 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. That is one of the reasons that we want to put the Word in the pews, and I will speak more about that next week. It becomes personal. In verses 17 and 19, Jesus teaches that the Word of God sanctifies us. *“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. It is the word of God that 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 great things. We are seeing great things being done in the midst of *this* body.
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. What is our mission? To seek and save those who are lost.
5. Jesus prayed that we would experience the joy of God. 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? I believe the answer has already been given. When we sense the presence of God, when we follow the Word of God, when we 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. Isn't that wonderful? That is what Jesus prayed for. I pray that that would be our prayer as well.

What Jesus prays grows out of the fact that He 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 11 – kill them. They tried to kill John by poisoning him 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 a Revelation of the “last days.” 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 – and that is sad but we know we can expect that. The disciples, like us, don't belong to it, but are to be sent into it, and so we need protecting! That's what this prayer is about. What they now need, therefore, is to be kept from being pulled back into ‘the world’ with all its wickedness and rebellion. During Jesus' public ministry, teaching them and leading them, our Lord looked after 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 the disciples too may be ‘set apart’. The word for ‘setting apart’ is basically the same as the word for ‘holy’; but our word ‘holy’, when we apply it to people, can give a sense of an over-pious-ness – “holier than thou” which is really foreign to the New Testament. We see this from time to time – It is “church lady!” Remember “church lady” on Saturday Night Live – played by Dana Carvey? “Isn't that special!” That was an example of over pioussness.

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In first-century Judaism, 'holiness' called to mind the Temple in particular. It was the holy place, the place where the holy God had promised to live. It referred in particular to the Holy of Holies, the innermost shrine, 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 – as a high priest. 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 them is to 'keep' them in the Father's name and to give them His Word. In other words, when He now entrusts them to the Father, this won't mean a sudden change, like a mother entrusting her children to someone they've never heard of and whose house will be run on quite different lines to their own home. Jesus has already taught them, so to speak, 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.

This prayer has been used for many centuries by pastors, teachers and other Christian leaders as they pray for those in their care. This is a serious prayer. It is one of the most serious things Jesus ever said. That's why, deep down, it is also among the most joyful and hopeful. Pray it with awe, with joy and with gladness and with thanksgiving. We have much to be thankful for!