

Jesu Juva

“Jesus’ Prayer for the Spirit”  
Text: John 17:11b-19 (1 John 5:9-15)

Alleluia! Christ is *ascended!* [*He is ascended indeed! Alleluia!*] Alleluia!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the Holy Gospel we heard today, Jesus is praying. That fact, in itself, is not that unusual. We are told often of Jesus praying. He gets up before the sun and goes off by Himself to pray. He prays before miracles. He goes to the Temple to pray. Jesus is an expert in prayer. In fact, He is the only human being who has ever mastered the art of prayer. We falter in our prayers. We struggle with our prayers. We often do not know how to pray as we ought. But for Jesus, praying is the air He breathes.

That should teach us something. It certainly did the disciples, who went up to Jesus and said: We want to be like that! Like you. *Teach us to pray* (Luke 11:1-4). In response to that request, Jesus gave them - and us - the words of the Lord’s Prayer. He gave us words to say, which, if you understand the depths of those petitions and what they mean, really do pray for everything we need.

But Jesus didn’t just give His us this prayer, He also then told His disciples a story about a man who needed food for a friend who had arrived on a journey. But he didn’t have any food to give him. So he goes to his neighbor who he knows can help, and begs him repeatedly for what he needs, until he gets it (Luke 11:5-13). And that, Jesus is teaching His disciples, is *also* how He will teach them to pray - by bringing people in need into their lives, people whose needs they are unable to help, and so they will have to pray. They will have to go to the One they know can help - their Father in heaven. And keep at it! Keep praying. Don’t give up.

And so for us - the people in Nepal after the earthquakes there, the people in the Midwest suffering devastation after tornadoes, the people killed and injured in the train wreck in Philadelphia - what can you do for them? Go to the One who can do all things and provide exactly what is needed. Pray for them. They may not be able to pray. They may not know how to pray. But you do. They are your neighbor in need, to drive you to prayer and teach you to pray.

So today in the Holy Gospel, Jesus is praying **because His friends are in need**. He is about to leave them. Up to this time, while He was with them, He has kept them and protected them. But now He is leaving and the world is going to hate them and the evil one will be after them. Jesus has already been the object of this hatred and wrath from the

world and the evil one, so He knows it's not going to be easy for them. And He's not going to be with them to keep and protect them anymore. So what can He do? *He prays for them.*

Now as I said, Jesus praying is not unusual. But what is is that here we are told *what* He is praying. *That* we are not often told, so when we *are* we should pay close attention and consider these words precious. And so here, today, we hear Jesus go to His Father and ask four things for His disciples then and for all time:

- (1.) keep them in your name; or in other words, keep them in the faith, believing;
- (2.) keep them from the evil one; protect them from his crafts and assaults that seek to pull them into false belief or misbelief;
- (3.) sanctify them, holy them, in the truth, in the Word; and
- (4.) make them one; unite them with each other and with the Father and the Son, just as they are one.

But though Jesus prays for these four things specifically, He is really praying for just one thing for us: **the Holy Spirit**. For all these four things are the work of the Holy Spirit. And this is also what Jesus told His disciples at the end of His teaching them about prayer, after the story that I mentioned earlier, when He concluded with these words: *If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him* (Luke 11:13)! Jesus, the master of prayer, is asking for the Spirit for us.

And next week, we'll celebrate the answer to that prayer as we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, when the Spirit came upon the Church in all His fullness to do those very things Jesus prayed for.

For it is the Holy Spirit that gives faith. We confess in the Creed that *I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified, and kept me in the true faith* . . . (Small Catechism, explanation to the Third Article). It is the Holy Spirit who puts the name of God upon us in Holy Baptism, gives us the gift of faith, and works to keep us there through Word and Sacrament. If He didn't, we would be no match for the evil one, who would easily pull us away. So ***keep them in your name***, Jesus prays. ***Keep them from the evil one***. Send them the Spirit to keep them.

And it is the Holy Spirit that sanctifies us, or makes us holy. It's easy to remember that because it's in His name: *Holy Spirit* - the Spirit that makes holy. And He does so by taking what Jesus has done for us, taking His forgiveness, life, and salvation, and giving it to us through the means of grace, the Word and Sacraments. I explain it in my catechism classes like this: in New York City, there are 10 million or so people who need water. Where do they all get it? They actually get it from reservoirs upstate, many miles away; *giant* reservoirs that are filled with rain and snow melt. That water is carried down

to the city through aqueducts built for just that purpose. That's what the Word and Sacraments are for us - the Spirit's aqueducts that bring Jesus' forgiveness to us. His forgiveness that by taking away our sin and cleansing us makes us holy. For this Jesus *consecrates Himself* and fills the reservoirs of heaven, and the Spirit, then, brings it to us, through the Word of truth, and the Word connected to water, bread, and wine. So *sanctify them in the truth*, Jesus prays. *Your word is truth*. Send them the Spirit through the Word to holy them.

And then this too, Jesus prays: *that [we] may be one*. This too is the work of the Holy Spirit because Jesus is not just praying for people of a certain time and place to be one, but of *all* times and *all* places. This is a unity far beyond just putting a "coexist" bumper sticker on the back of your car - this is the Church transcending *all* times and places and united in Christ. That we be one with the believers of the Old Testament, the martyrs of the early church, the persecuted in the Middle East today, and the little ones baptized somewhere just this morning. That we be part of that "*one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all*" (Ephesians 4:4-5). That is not a unity we can do or achieve; only the Holy Spirit can. So, Jesus prays, *make them one*; send them the Spirit to unite them with us, Father. One Church, militant and triumphant, in heaven and on earth. One in Christ.

Then right after Jesus prays these words, He is arrested. And He departs in joy and peace, for He knows His prayer has been heard and answered. He knows His friends - and those who believe because of the Word they preach - will be taken care of. He entrusts us into the hands of the Father, who does all things well.

And the Father sends the Spirit on Pentecost. But not only then. Through the preaching of the Word and the water of baptism the Spirit has come *to you* and is working this work *in you*: keeping you, guarding you, sanctifying you, and making you one. Which, in a world hurtling toward unbelief seemingly faster than ever, we need more than ever. That we be a people formed not by the truths and teachings of the world, and conformed to the world, but formed by the Word of God and prayer and united in Him. Jesus knew it wouldn't be easy, and so prays for you.

A prayer which is also answered here, as we come to the Table to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus today. Here we are made one with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. Here we join with the saints who have gone before us and those all around the world who gather wherever they are, for we are all gathered by one Spirit, around one Lord, to be fed and forgiven by Him. A oneness and unity only our Lord could achieve, and does. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, **for you**.

And given all that, we too now pray. Like Jesus. With the same confidence as Jesus. We pray the prayer Jesus taught us and for all people according to their need. What a blessing that we are able to do so, for people we know and don't know, for those close or far

away, for family and friends, for old or young, schoolmates, even for our enemies, and to know this too: that our Father hears our prayer. And so we entrust ourselves and all for whom we pray into His hands, knowing there is no better place to be. And so we, just as Jesus, no matter how or when, can depart in joy and peace. We are in the hands of our Father, redeemed by the Son, and in the care and keeping of the Spirit. Our God, who does all things well.

In His Name - the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.