

Easter 7C (5/16/10 – *The Risen & Ascended Christ Prays for Us*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

The Risen & Ascended Christ Prays for Us. That is what we hear in our *Holy Gospel* for this *Seventh* – and last – *Sunday of Easter*. *I do not ask for these only* – that is, only for the Eleven Apostles there in the Upper Room ... since Judas has gone to betray Him – *but also for those who will believe in Me through their Word*, says Christ – for those who will believe through the Word of the Gospel the Apostles would proclaim and then record by inspiration of the Holy Spirit ... and through that same Gospel-Word that continues to be preached in Christ's Church and in the daily lives of His saints [JN 17.20]. *The Risen & Ascended Christ Prays for Us* here in our text – for us who believe in Him because of that faith-creating Word.

And when *The Risen & Ascended Christ Prays for Us*, He prays for our unity – our oneness – with one another ... with Him ... and with the Father. We confessed this just a few moments ago in the Creed: *I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church*. We don't see that unity in the visible Church. It must simply be believed and confessed. We often don't have it in our personal lives. Indeed, sometimes we don't see it even in this place. What was it Christ said elsewhere? *For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three*. [LK 12.52] Jesus was talking about families – and we certainly and sadly see that in the world ... and sometimes in our own lives. But I suppose we can also apply it to the visible Church. There are disagreements ... divisions ... schisms. The lack of unity leads to doubts ... then distrust ... then sometimes anger ... hateful thoughts and words ... and finally separation.

It happens when we fail to abide in Christ ... in His Word. It occurs when we break the *Third Commandment* and despise preaching and God's Word – either by lax attendance ... or by lack of attention when we do attend. We should allow **nothing** to distract us from receiving God's Holy Word and Sacraments offered in this place. It comes about when we fail to

hold God's Word sacred ... and neglect to gladly hear and learn it – daily. It takes place when we let the world intimidate us with what foolishly passes as knowledge ... and we suppress and even yield our faith to its nonsense.

On a larger scale, a lack of unity – disunity – happens when we collectively place our worldly wisdom over the Word of Christ. Which is to say, that disunity, division, and schism happen when a group, a congregation – or entire church body – embraces false doctrine or practice. In all such cases, the unity that Christ would have us know and understand and realize is shattered – by man's sinfulness ... by your sinfulness and mine.

And when we consider how *The Risen & Ascended Christ Prays for Us* here in this text, we must also recognize a great many other sins. Christ prays: *O righteous Father* [JN 17.25] – but we know that we ... of ourselves ... are quite **un**righteous. We sin **daily**! Our thoughts are impure. Our words are filled with meanness and iniquity. Our deeds are all too often **un**just. We are quite able to despise people who are good, on the one hand. And on the other, we too readily pursue and cultivate friendships with those who are evil. We seem much too comfortable with things down here – when we should earnestly desire to be where Christ is ... to see His glory. We ought to long for and imitate that wondrous love Christ has for us – love that begins with and emanates from the Father's love for His beloved Son ... God's love that began before the foundations of this world [17.24].

But we don't – because we're sinners. And that is precisely why *The Risen & Ascended Christ Prays for Us* so very fervently here in His *High-Priestly Prayer* ... and always [ROM 8.34; HEB 7.25]. Jesus prays, *Holy Father, keep them in Your Name, which You have given Me, that they may be one, even as We are One* [17.11]. He asks the Father to *sanctify them in the truth* – namely, in the Father's everlastingly true Word [17.17]. Then our Savior clarifies that He is not praying on behalf of the Apostles only, but for **all** believers of **all** time – including you and me!

And what Christ prays for on our behalf is nothing less than astounding!

The Son wants us to share the same unity that He shares with the Father ... and the Holy Spirit – an interpenetrating unity ... binding believers together with each other and with God just as tightly as the Holy Trinity is bound together. *That they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us.* [17.21] And notice an important aspect of this unity – it is self-sacrificing ... self-effacing ... self-subjecting. Again and again our Lord speaks about passing on to us what He has **received** from the Father – glory ... love ... even the believers themselves [17.24]. All these belong to the Son just as much as they do to the Father ... and the Holy Spirit. But in humbling Himself – even before His incarnation – the Son teaches us and lives for us the serving role we all have from God.

Our glory will be as the Son's glory – glory **received** from God ... glory **received** in serving others ... and in serving God the Father above all. **Not** as a reward ... much less something earned – but simply as God's gracious, loving **gift** to us. And Christ uses that serving-glory to bring about unity. *The glory that You have given Me I have given them, that they may be one even as We are One.* [17.22] That glory and unity come from the serving Savior, Jesus Christ, Himself ... and from the Father Who sent Him: *I in them and You in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that You sent Me and loved them even as You loved Me.* [17.23] And that is nothing less than utterly astounding! The Son and the Father abide in us together with the Holy Spirit – unite Themselves to us! That the Holy Triune God has united us to Himself is too wonderful for words!

O righteous Father, even though the world does not know You, I know You, and these know that You have sent Me. I made known to them Your Name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which You have loved Me may be in them, and I in them. [17.25-26] Here is the essence of the Gospel. The eternally righteous Father **loves us** with the very same, everlasting love He has – and always has had – for His perfect, only-begotten Son. The eternally righteous God makes Himself known to this world which has turned away from their Creator. He makes Himself known

through the Gospel-Word and Sacraments – in order that we might believe in Christ and thus be united to our Triune God forever. The righteousness that we inherently lack – because we are conceived and born sinners – is supplied by our holy God and graciously **given** to us for the sake of Christ. The knowledge of our Lord and Creator that we once lost in the Garden is being restored and renewed in us by His own continual working in our lives – until that day when we know Him perfectly in heaven ... even as we are known by Him, as St. Paul says: *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.* [1COR 13.12]

And now I've saved the best for last – verse 24: *Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, may be with Me where I am, to see My glory that You have given Me because You loved Me before the foundation of the world.* Our Savior's most ardent desire is that we should be with Him where He has ascended ... in heaven. And since *The Risen & Ascended Christ Prays for Us*, we can be assured that this will most certainly come to pass. For where Christ our Head has gone, we the members of His body shall also be. That is the message of the *Ascension*, which we celebrated Thursday – on its fortieth day after our Savior's Resurrection. Behold how secure your heavenly inheritance is! The Father has loved the Son since *before the foundation of the world*. The Father *has given* the Son glory – which means that Christ received that glory in the past ... but that it continually endures. And just as it goes with the glory of Christ, so it goes with all believers whom the Father *has given* to Him. You were given already in the past ... but you shall continually endure as Christ's beloved possession ... through trial and tribulation here on earth ... and for eternity. You are in Christ – engraved in His nail-marked hands ... abiding in Him ... and He in you. And just as surely as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit eternally dwell together in perfect unity, so shall you and all believers in Christ live in that perfect and glorious unity forever!

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]