

***“... And When You Cannot Pray for Yourself...”***

This morning we get to listen in on Jesus’ prayer. One level, that’s not a nice thing to do . . . Pray is (or can be) quite intimate. I’m not sure I would want you eavesdropping on my prayers. But here we are given permission because the Holy Spirit has led John to record these words so that we can hear them. Besides, there are times when I do pray out loud with others, just so that they can be comforted by the words of that prayer. Jesus would want to do no less for us.

But to get at this prayer, we need to rummage around in it a bit. The main points are not so easily heard, much less grasped; and we can (okay, I can!) find ourselves (myself!) roaming down some rabbit trail that gets us (me) off the main point.

The prayer basically is in three parts: The first part forms the bulk of our Gospel reading today: here Jesus prays primarily for Himself. The second part comes toward the end of today’s reading and goes on for several more verses: here Jesus prays for us, believers in Him. The third part takes up the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter: Jesus prays for those who will come to faith through our witness.

Jesus prays for Himself: His essential plea? ***“Glorify Your Son.”*** Much of contemporary theology and worship has this all wrong. This is not about the majesty, power, and splendor of Jesus — it is about His crucifixion. Now, it is true that the very human Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane did pray for some avenue out of this path to the cross. But this Son of God recognizes that this is indeed where the glory that God wants Him to have is to be found — glory is found in willing submission to the Father. Whatever else may come of that submission — and since we are not God we don’t know, nor can we even surmise, what God may wish to do in and with our lives — whatever comes by the submitting to God is at the heart of the Christian life.

Jesus has an advantage over us (in all kinds of ways! but in this

specifically!): He knows what it is to be glorified in the Father. He prays for that which He had with the Father before the foundation of the world. You and I know nothing of that, not by experience. We may know what it's like to receive accolades in the world (one time at the Cleveland Orchestra, Kristine and I heard a twenty-three-year-old violinist play a Mozart concerto to a standing ovation, and then follow it up with a Bach partita that was just stunning — what a show-off!).

So maybe we're not world-renowned musicians — but you get your kids (sometimes) or grand-kids to cheer you on, or get a pat on the back from your boss, or you can hear the ten people in the stands cheer at the run-scoring single you hit at the softball game. But to share the glory of the Father from the foundation of the world — for that we are going to have to wait.

To submit to the Father here and now, in that we can follow our Lord. But it does not just “happen” (if it did, Jesus would not pray for it here). It is true that God is waiting to do some things in our lives; He is waiting for us to pray on it. Some things He just does — either because He promised He would, or because He knows we desperately need it (even if we don't). Some things He will never do, no matter how often we ask — unlike parents who oftentimes give the child what the child wants because otherwise we'll have to listen to the whining and complaining all the way home and it's just easier to give in. There are some things in which God is delaying His action until we come to Him in prayer. Sometimes He delays because He wants us to come to the realization of our need; sometimes He delays because we need to come to realization that we are not in control. Waiting on the Lord is a good thing — it is often not an easy thing, but it is a good thing.

When I said that to submit to the Father does not just happen, I was not addressing what God would do — I was speaking to what we need to do. We often are not ready to submit — for a whole host of reasons:  
We continue in the myth that we are in charge;  
We hold to the idea that our opinion is what matters most;

We see no need to submit (things are going along just fine, thank you);  
We think we have a better idea;  
We'll tough it out our own way;  
And my personal favorite (use it all the time!): I just don't want to.

So God must often prepare us to be able to submit. Sometimes that involves some painful experiences in which we question God's sanity, probity, and love. Sometimes that means less than painful, but nonetheless disappointing, times. Sometimes we find ourselves wondering where God disappeared to, when He is right there all along, just on the other side of our stubborn arrogance.

Jesus prays to be glorified, and He knows that will bring Him up against the forces of evil, death and Hell. You may think to yourself at that point: *"Thanks, but no thanks!" "If that's glory, I'll opt for dishonor (or whatever the opposite of glory may be)."*

Then Jesus shifts gears and starts to pray for us. There is considerable scholarly divergence of opinion on this. When Jesus prays for ***"those whom you gave me from the world"*** some scholars would argue that this means the disciples mentioned in today's First Lesson, the ones commonly referred to as "the Twelve." Others would argue: *"No, He means all — including you and me — who come to faith in Him as Messiah and Lord."* I must confess that I lean toward that latter opinion.

I didn't always lean that way; I was schooled in the former point of view which would then go on to say that, when Jesus prays for those who come to faith by with witness of this group, He meant us. But now I think not. I have come to the confession (it is much stronger than mere opinion) that Jesus prays for all believers — you and me included — when He asks the Father . . . well, that just the issue: What is He asking anyhow?

He keeps hemming and hawing (as I read it) down the prayer without getting to the central point. It's like reading a long passage in German and having to turn the page until you find the verb and can know what the heck is being said.

He goes on about giving us the word, and about how we received it (or better translated how we *are receiving* it). He makes the point that He is praying specifically for us and not for the entire world. Now, if prayer is asking, what is He asking for? Just this: ***“Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.”***

What can that mean, to ***“protect them in your name”***? At the very least it means that there is power in the name of God. This is why God doesn't want us to throw His name about willy-nilly “in vain.” The ancients believed that to have the name of the god was to tap into that god's power (this tells you why, when Jacob wrestled with God at the brook named Jabbock, he would not release his hold on God until he was given a name — it turned out that the name he was given was a new one for himself . . . so God has surprises!)

You and I are baptized ***“into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*** We are not just using the name as a symbol, we have been immersed in that name. It would not be incorrect to say that we now bear that name. Oh, what power God has placed at our disposal in His name.

Jesus knew and used that power — not “superhuman” Jesus, not God-switch-on-the-back-when-I-need-it Jesus, not just-pretending-to-be-human Jesus — the all-very-human Jesus. Jesus who we hear pray about His glory with the Father. What's that? We know that Jesus set that aside in becoming human.

It is the name . . . Jesus knows the name . . . Jesus uses the name . . . the name is intimate (“Abba”) and He points out that He has taught that name to His own: to us!

So for us He prays that we have the protection of that name, as well. Why? So that we can live life on our terms? So that we can become the stars in our own movies? No! So that we can become God's instruments to bring others to know and bear His name. God would use us to bring

about His purposes.

Do you know what God's purposes are? I suspect you know some — His love for us human creatures and His desire that we love Him in return; His sending of His own Son to bring about our redemption; the promise of life to those who believe — these we can know and rejoice to know them!

But what about specifics for your life? Where does God want you to be next week? Next year? In ten years? If you are thinking, "*Right where I am now*" — how comforting is that? How depressing is that? If you are thinking, "*I have no idea*" — how exciting is that? How nerve-wracking? Investment people always want to know what's your risk tolerance. God doesn't care to ask. How do we find out? There's always the eschatological verification system: "*Just wait!*" and hey! That works!

Let's try a different approach, a more proactive way: How about joining Jesus at prayer, asking the Father to glorify each of us? "*What are you, nuts?! Do you have any idea how dangerous that could be? Jesus asked for that and look where it led Him! Up the hill to Golgotha and an early death.*" Look at it this way — you won't have to wonder how far your IRA will take you. More to the point: Look at where it led Jesus — through death, yes, but into life, and into the Father.

And know this: Jesus is already praying this for you — you are His, bought and paid for, and He knows you by name — and He is asking the Father to use you as the Father used Him. It seems to me that you can either embrace that or be dragged along kicking and screaming.

That may not be what you would pray for yourself. No mention is made of the lottery, or mansions, yachts, fabulous ports of call, and exotic destinations. But it will mean that, submitting to the Father, following Jesus' lead, you will be walking the path that is truly transforming, not conforming. It is, Jesus says, the path to life eternal: to "***know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.***"

So when you cannot pray for yourself — or don't want to, and don't

know how to, or don't know for what to pray — realize Jesus has been praying for you all along, the Spirit also interceding with sighs and moans too deep for words, asking that the Father's name might cover you, and that you will submit to Him. Pray with Jesus, today and all days, that you may be led to submit and follow, as did our Lord.

Amen.