

7 Easter – Year C – May 19, 2010 - Homily
Acts 16:16 -34; Psalm 97; Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21; John 17:20-26
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To most of us, Jesus' prayer in tonight's Gospel reading might sound like some of the creeds of the early church. At that time, the church fathers were working hard to cover every aspect of orthodox belief, and develop doctrines against common heresies to the point where the language seems desperately convoluted and the sentences are very long! However, if we listen closely and look at some of the wordplay in the original Greek, we hear and see several much more interesting parts to this prayer, commonly called Jesus' high-priestly prayer. Tucked into the nooks and crannies, there are vital clues and important themes; and above all there is hope for the present, and hope for the future.

Firstly, we can hardly miss the fact that Jesus is praying about unity here. Unity for the believers and early church communities, and also a continuity of oneness with all who will believe because of the witness of the church. This part of Jesus' prayer has even become part of our liturgy. During our Eucharistic prayer just before the Holy, holy, holy, we acknowledge that we are in the presence of all the saints and all the company of heaven, as we praise God's name. Tonight's reading is the last gathering of Jesus and His disciples before He is arrested. Look what Jesus did before He went to His glory through the cross. He prayed for you and for me, and for all believers, just as He still intercedes for us with God the Father in heaven.

The word "one" pops up a **lot** in this passage, as does the word "in". What we miss in the English translation is the play of words between "in", which in the Greek is *en* – e, n – and "one", as in the Greek *hen* – h, e, n. In other words as Jesus is praying, He is speaking of His *indwelling* that empowers *oneness* or unity amongst believers. He is also linking this form of indwelling to Jesus' own divine relationship with God the Father. God in Him, and He in God, and all believers in God, as God dwells within all believers. The implication in Jesus' prayer is that believers on earth will share the same intimate relationship, bound by love, which is found in the relationship of the Holy Trinity, that is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is to relationship what we pray in the Lord's Prayer when we say, "Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven."

In the last sentence of this portion of John's Gospel we read, "I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them." The presence of Christ dwells in our hearts according to Jesus' promise to be with us until the end of the age, and binds us into a community of grace and mission. We too are full of God's love in the power of the Holy Spirit. As we read in Colossians 3:14, "Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." Paradoxically, this vibrant yet invisible thread of unity in love *is* visible as the organic and physical unity in community represented by Christ's Body on earth throughout all the ages. Once again, Christ's Body, the church, is a reflection of the dynamic unity-in-community of the Holy Trinity. As such, all Christians, regardless of human-made doctrinal walls, and denominational boundaries are bound together by our common love for God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Realistically, we will never achieve unity in matters of doctrine, or probably even come close to agreeing on how to read the Bible, for example. However, Jesus' prayer is for unity in relationship, where God's love is the thread that binds us together. We love, not for our own

sakes, but because love in action is how we share in the life of God, so that God finds a home in us, and we find our home in God above all other relationships. Growing in love brings us closer to union with God.

In practical terms, Jesus' prayer is that this common grounding in love, which is the foundation of every believer's faith, will serve as a powerful witness to our dislocated world of who God is, and what God desires. Love of God is a witness of faith in action, drawing others to Christ, *and* a testimony to the truth that Jesus is God's only Son, sent by God the Father to redeem the whole world, so that all may be reconciled to God through Him. The ultimate end and purpose of Jesus' life, death and resurrection is that the whole of humanity and creation will be reconciled to God. As one commentator (F. Belton Joyner, Jr.) puts it, "Love is the key descriptor of the divine interrelationship, the bond within the Holy Trinity. Love is the divine gift to the disciples. Love is the magnetic grace through which God seeks to attract the world. Love is the ingredient that the Lord prays be within his followers." Again, in practical terms there is nothing romantic or fuzzy about this love. This love is modeled in Jesus' perfect sacrifice of Himself on the cross, and frequently takes the shape of sacrificial love in the lives of Christ's followers. This is self-giving love that puts the needs of others before ourselves. It is the type of love that leads to new and renewed life in Christ, to the glory of His name.

The early church father, Origen, suggested that Christian unity prefigures the unity of humanity in the redeemed, restored, and healed community in Christ. You and I live out our resurrection lives now in love as individuals. But it's worth noticing that this vision of unity is also very much oriented towards the whole community of faith. Together, we must attend to our own unity as part of Christ's commission to this community of faith, and the church. Does that mean we should all hold exactly the same views and agree on everything? Not at all. The strength of our unity is that we can agree to disagree, and still love one another because we are brothers and sisters in Christ. The strength of our unity is found in our diversity, and rooted in our love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Our own unity in love and faith then becomes our witness to the broader community of God's love for all creation. That witness involves living our values, living our faith. It involves how we speak about our faith, what we do, and the way we do it.

So what do you think all of this adds up to? It adds up to hope. There is so much anxiety, division, and a deep sense of hopelessness in the world, that our witness of hope in Christ is essential in this moment, and also offers the promise of hope for the future. Jesus models the truth of our baptismal covenant: that the deepest moments of life are those when our hearts and habits are whole enough to include others. Here's how Martin Luther describes faith and love, "Faith, like light, should always be simple...; while love, like warmth, should beam forth on every side, and bend to every necessity of [humanity]." The indwelling love of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit is so that we may continue His work of mission in and to the world. In the words of the rock band U2, we share "One life / But we're not the same / We get to carry each other." The good news is we don't do this alone, we do God's work together, and it is God's love that provides the one power strong enough to redeem the world.

Amen.