

Jesus' High Priestly Prayer

The gospel for this coming Sunday (Seventh Sunday of Easter) is John 17:1-11. In this text Jesus prays for himself and his disciples.

The last thing Jesus did before leaving for the Garden of Gethsemane was lift His eyes heavenward and pray aloud to God the Father. This prayer has been called Jesus' high priestly prayer because with it Jesus functioned as high priest and interceded to the Father, for the disciples first and then for all believers. It was a prayer such as only the Son of God could pray, truly the Lord's Prayer.

The prayer may be visualized as a series of concentric circles expanding outward. Our Lord first prays for himself, that the Father may glorify his Son, so that the Son may in turn glorify the Father. In language typical of the theology of the cross, the term "glorify" paradoxically refers to the ignominy of his crucifixion. That horrible, shameful event is the hour of Christ's glory, through which he glorifies the Father by fulfilling the will of him who sent him.

The circle expands as Christ then intercedes specifically for the elect—those the Father has given him—and explicitly not for the world at large (v 9). If we take the past-tense verbs literally, Christ is praying for the disciples, who had already received his Word and believed that he was sent from the Father.

Later in the prayer, after our text, the circle expands further as Christ prays also for those who would come to believe through the disciples' word (v 20). Jesus is not only praying for those disciples gathered around the Passover table with him, but also for all disciples everywhere of all times, who, baptized in the triune name (cf. v 6), gather at his holy Table, receive his Word, and do his work "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (In 6:28).

Jesus deliberately prays to his Father in the presence of his disciples. He wants them to hear his prayer requests, which directly apply to them. They are about to go through a tremendous shock—his death, resurrection, and then his departure. They need this prayer, as do we. How encouraging for us to know that no matter what we go through, Jesus is with us, because we belong to him. "No one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand" (Jn 10:28–29).

The character of this intercession is profound beyond description, possessing an eternal, timeless quality. It offers a glimpse into the communion between the Father and Son, a communion in which we participate, thanks to the intercessory work and prayer of Christ.

It is very comforting when someone tells us that they are praying for us. But there is nothing even close to knowing that Jesus is interceding for us. It is almost unimaginable and extremely reassuring and gives a peace that is way beyond all worldly understanding.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for your consoling word that you are praying for me and my fellow Christians. Amen