

Jesus' Prayer for His Disciples

The gospel lesson for this coming Sunday (Seventh Sunday of Easter) is John 17:11b-19. This reading is the middle portion of Jesus' High Priestly Prayer. The prayer itself is set among Jesus' teachings at the Last Supper and immediately prior to his departure for the Garden of Gethsemane.

During the three years of His public ministry Jesus was constantly with his disciples. *"Was with them"* denotes constant and continued action. Now Jesus was going to leave the world and go to the Father, but the disciples had to remain in the world. So, Jesus prayed for them, placing them in the Father' care.

Jesus' prayer was heard by the disciples. Why did Jesus pray in their hearing? Luther answers: "In order that through the Word, caught with the ears and held in the hearts, they be comforted, and would joyfully rely upon it, and be able to say: "See, this is what my Lord Christ said . . . this have I heard from his mouth."

A friend of mine once told me not just to pray for him but pray with him before finishing the conversation. He needed to hear that petition right then and there. Another friend once told me that he was praying for me every day. It was very soothing to wake up each day and know that he was lifting me up to the Lord. In the verses that follow this text Jesus goes on to pray for all Christians. Romans 8:34 may be even more comforting when it says: *"who (Jesus) was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."*

Jesus care for his disciples comes in giving them the Word from the Father. This Word of truth is also there for us at all times. Like the disciples, we live, work and have our being in a world where there are many dangers surrounding us.

When in verse 17 Jesus says *"sanctify them,"* he means to claim them wholly to himself. Christians are sanctified, separated from the world, as soon as faith has been worked in their hearts. It is the Word of God that purifies our hearts and minds. Armed with it, we are called to be salt and light. Jesus died on the cross not only to save us but also to consecrate us to God's service.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for your prayers for your children. Thank you for giving us your true Word to keep us in the faith. Thank you for setting us apart to be your witnesses to everyone around us. Empower us to attest to your great mercy wherever we go. Amen