

*Homily for June 6, 2019*

Unity isn't easy. Most of us have never learned how to disagree in love, or how to love those with whom we disagree. We're like the poet who wrote:

"To dwell above with saints we love,  
That will be grace and glory.  
To live below with saints we know;  
Well, that's another story!"

Jesus knew that to dwell below with saints we know, well that's another story. That is why in his last prayer before his Passion he prayed for the unity among those who are his disciples, especially those disciples who would believe in him centuries later.

The Priestly Prayer, as it is known, because it comes right before the offering of the Cross, consists of three parts: in the first (vv 1–5) Jesus asks for the glorification of his holy human nature and the acceptance, by the Father of his sacrifice on the cross. In the second part (vv. 6–19) he prays for his apostles, whom he is going to send out into the world to proclaim the redemption which he is now about to accomplish. And then (vv. 20–26) he prays for unity among all those who will believe in him over the course of the centuries, until they achieve full union with him in heaven.<sup>1</sup> That union is described beautifully in verse 24:

*Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.<sup>2</sup>*

Throughout the chapter there are two governing words, uniting the prayer. These words are: “sent” and “one”.

Let me quote the verses where we have the word “sent”

*And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.<sup>3</sup>*

In this verse eternal life is equated to knowing the Jesus was sent from the Father. In the next verse we read:

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<sup>1</sup> [\*Saint John's Gospel\*](#). (2005). (p. 166). Dublin; New York: Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishers.

<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Jn 17:24). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

<sup>3</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Jn 17:3). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

***for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.*** <sup>4</sup>

In this verse Jesus equates knowing him with his teaching, the words he has given to them. Notice as well there is an intensifying of the apostles knowing Jesus was sent by the Father, “they know in truth I came from you”.

With these verses Jesus is emphasizing his apostolic mission for the word “sent” in Greek is the word *apostolos*, from which we get the word “apostle”.

Jesus is therefore the first apostle because he was sent from the Father to earth so that we could know the Trinitarian God so have eternal life.

Now listen to the next usage for the word “sent” in John 17:

***<sup>18</sup>As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.*** <sup>5</sup>

Jesus was sent from heaven to a particular place on earth, the land of Israel with a particular focus on the city of Jerusalem. From there he sent the apostles throughout the Roman Empire and then eventually throughout the world so that as he prayed in verse 20, he would anticipate our being gathered here at St. Peter’s on this day:

***I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word***<sup>6</sup>

Do you see the progression? Jesus, the Word was sent into the world and the original apostles believed his words. The apostles were sent into the world and we believe in Jesus because of their word. Now listen please to the association between the verb sent and the adjective one in the verses that follow. I am going to read the verses in succession:

<sup>21</sup> that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Jn 17:8). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

<sup>5</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Jn 17:18). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

<sup>6</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Jn 17:20). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

<sup>7</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Jn 17:21). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.<sup>8</sup>

“Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me.”<sup>269</sup>

Here is the beautiful teaching of John 17. Our unity is the clearest sign to an unbelieving world of the Apostolic Mission of Jesus. In John 17 Jesus prays that his church will be Catholic, that is Universal and united. However such unity is dependent on us, not on him. Repeatedly he prays that they “may we be one”.

When in your life and mine, we come to a deeper conversion to Jesus, knowing he was sent by the Father and then have a deeper conversion to the Church, that the apostles were sent by Jesus, we will in turn have this deeper unity. A unity that is centred in the teaching of Jesus entrusted to the Church, most fully reflected in the lives of the saints so that we can live below with the saints we know and share in the story of Jesus’ unifying love.

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<sup>8</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Jn 17:23). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

<sup>9</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Jn 17:25–26). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.