

Homily for Tuesday of the 7th Week of Easter

Seventeen times the Gospel of John mentions the “hour” of Jesus. In today’s reading we have the climatic use of this word when Jesus says to the Father:

“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you

In the first half of the book, (1-11) the “hour” is a highly anticipated moment in the ministry of Jesus that constantly grabs the attention of the reader and drives the narrative forward. In the second half of the book, readers discover that Jesus comes upon his “hour” only in the final days of his life

A careful analysis of the Fourth Gospel reveals two dimensions of this mysterious “hour”, one rooted in the historical life of Christ and another in the liturgical life of the Church.

THE HISTORICAL HOUR

The “hour” of Christ is first and foremost the appointed time of his Passion, which in John, as in all the Gospels, is the climactic phase of his mission. Before this time the attempts of Jesus’ enemies to arrest him are in vain because his “hour” has not yet come, as John 8:20 clearly expresses:

These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

The clock begins ticking, however, at the start of Passion Week, when Jesus declares that the “hour” of his glorification has at last arrived as we read in chapter 12.

And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified.

Although troubled by the painful ordeal that will seize him in this “hour” as this verse expresses:

Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour

Jesus embraces the prospect of suffering as the “hour” when he will pass out of this world to his heavenly Father as we read in John 13:1

Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father

At the historical level, then, the “hour” is the time when Christ passes through the agonies of betrayal and bodily torment, finally mounting the Cross out of love for the Father and as a

sacrifice for our salvation. This “hour” of Christ’s humiliation and death is in John’s Gospel the “hour” of his exaltation that becomes the source of everlasting life for the world as today’s verse so clearly expresses:

“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you

THE LITURGICAL HOUR

If Christ’s “hour” is linked with the historical events of his Passion, it also reaches beyond them into the liturgical commemoration of these events in the life of the Church. Several statements regarding the “hour” of Jesus are thus connected with Christian worship.

In Jn 2:4, Jesus responds to his Mother’s request for wine with the puzzling statement “My hour has not yet come.” The hidden premise, it seems, is that when this still-distant “hour” finally arrives, he expects to provide an abundance of the finest wine (Jn 2:10). This may be read as an allusion to the liturgy, where believers all over the world gather to worship Christ as he pours himself into the Eucharistic cup under the visible sign of wine.

In Jn 4:21–23, Jesus insists that his coming “hour” has everything to do with worship—and not just with any worship, but with a spiritual adoration of the Father superior to any previously known in Samaria or even in Israel!

You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him.

The worship characteristic of this “hour” will not be confined to any particular mountain sanctuary, but will lift true worshipers up to a new and heavenly height in the Spirit (Rev 1:10, chaps. 4 and 5).

These two dimensions of the “hour” are part of the one Paschal Mystery of Christ. We cannot, therefore, drive a wedge between the historical and the liturgical, between the sacrificial gift of Christ to the Father on the Cross and the sacramental gift of Christ to us in the liturgy.

When we gather for the Mass we are joining in the historical hour that reached its culmination when Jesus was glorified on the Cross. When we gather for the Mass we are joining in the Liturgical hour that has from the founding of the Church been the source and summit of our Christian life.

I pray that better understanding the importance of the hour as both historical and liturgical in John’s Gospel will help us ever more appreciate the gift of this hour when we gather for the Eucharist and so share in the hour of Jesus.

