

Wednesday of the Seventh Week of Easter May 27th

READING: John 17:11-19

And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

~~~

New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicised Catholic Edition, copyright © 1989, 1993, 1995 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

## ***REFLECTION***

The prayer of Jesus expresses Jesus' deep and compassionate longing for us all – for his first prickly followers and for his countless prickly followers ever since. Prayer, when we speak of Jesus offering it, is a complex matter; John 11:42 has already demonstrated

that John is deeply aware of the complexities. In Jesus prayer becomes a communication of divine will for humanity and the church; for one who is so inseparably interconnected with God and is God doesn't need, in a sense, to pray. Yet we need to hear the longing of the divine heart for us: longing amongst other matters, that we be protected, that we be united, that we be a people of integrity.

History doesn't need to be studied too closely to realize that "protection," in the hands of God, is not some sort of insurance policy against bad things happening to us and to those we love. They do and they will. Sufferings and trauma, emotional and physical, are the risk of being human. Virus, bacteria, speeding cars, failing organs: these are a part of all our existences, and while it does seem to me, on occasion, that God intervenes inexplicably in our vicissitudes, these happenings are never on our terms, and almost certainly more rare than we might like. God does, it seems to me, often give us the strength to bear matters we never expected we could, and that is a profound answer to prayer. Yet even that is not always true, and I have known on occasions, deeply faith-filled believers broken by unbearable circumstances. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

As for being "one," we hardly need to be Sherlock Holmes to deduce that the Body of Christ has never achieved this – even from apostolic times: "it has been reported to me that there are quarrels amongst you," cries Paul (1 Cor. 1:11), and matters get worse (2 Cor. 2:1). John fares no better, engaging in bitter conflict with someone called Diotrephes (3 John 9-10). Fights over liturgical practice, sexuality, the clothes the vicar wears, the car she drives ... these are no new thing, no godly thing. Even given the oft-spoken wisdom that Jesus prays for unity, not uniformity, we still find many ways to thwart his longing.

Christ-bearing is no simple exercise. But there are signs of hope along the way. Just occasionally in our journey we find those whose Christ-love is so deep that they transcend almost all division, or moments when unity trumps division, love trumps hate. The biretta-doffing anglo-catholic, fundamentally *au fait* with every jot and tittle of Percy Dearmer's *The Parson's Handbook*, praying at the bedside of the Franklin Graham devotee who has lost a child, or the Spong-chanting post-modernist engaged deeply in pastoral care with a fierce creationist at a time of Pandemic: these are glimpses of a deeper unity that Jesus longs for and that will, in my simple faith, be a hallmark of that Day when we no longer see through a darkened glass, and is occasionally glimpsed even this side of the Parousia.

And all the while our task remains one of seeking Christlight in the darkest recesses of our lives. That way in our lives at least the prayer of Jesus may be answered, and we may be comfort bringers, union-bringers, integrity-bringers in our small spheres.