

XI. OUR LORD'S SACERDOTAL PRAYER

Jesus closes His life with inimitable calmness, confidence and sublimity. "I have glorified Thee; I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do." The annals of earth have nothing comparable to it in real security and sublimity. May we come to our end thus, in supreme loyalty to Christ.--Edward Bounds

We come now to consider our Lord's Sacerdotal Prayer, as found recorded in the seventeenth chapter of John's Gospel.

Obedience to the Father and abiding in the Father, these belong to the Son, and these belong to us, as partners with Christ in His Divine work of intercession. How tenderly and with what pathos and how absorbingly He prays for His disciples! "I pray for them; I pray not for the world." What a pattern of prayerfulness for God's people! For God's people are God's cause, God's Church and God's Kingdom. Pray for God's people, for their unity, their sanctification, and their glorification. How the subject of their unity pressed upon Him! These walls of separation, these alienations, these riven circles of God's family, and these warring tribes of ecclesiastics--how He is torn and bleeds and suffers afresh at the sight of these divisions! Unity--that is the great burden of that remarkable Sacerdotal Prayer. "That they may be one, even as we are one." The spiritual oneness of God's people--that is the heritage of God's glory to them, transmitted by Christ to His Church.

First of all, in this prayer, Jesus prays for Himself, not now the suppliant as in Gethsemane, not weakness, but strength now. There is not now the pressure of darkness and of hell, but passing for the time over the fearful interim, He asks that He may be glorified, and that His exalted glory may secure glory to His Father. His sublime loyalty and fidelity to God are declared, that fidelity to God which is of the very essence of interceding prayer. Our devoted lives pray. Our unswerving loyalty to God are eloquent pleas to Him and give access and confidence in our advocacy. This prayer is gemmed, but its walls are adamant. What profound and granite truths! What fathomless mysteries! What deep and rich experiences do such statements as these involve:

"And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.

"And all mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them.

"And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it, that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

"And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."

Let us stop and ask, have we eternal life? Do we know God experimentally, consciously, and do we know Him really and personally? Do we know Jesus Christ as a person, and as a personal Saviour? Do we know Him by a heart acquaintance, and know Him well? This, this only, is eternal life. And is Jesus glorified in us? Let us continue this personal inquiry. Do our lives prove His divinity? And does Jesus shine brighter because of us? Are we opaque or transparent bodies, and do we darken or reflect His pure light? Once more let us ask: Do we seek

God's glory? Do we seek glory where Christ sought it? "Glorify thou me with thy own self." Do we esteem the presence and the possession of God our most excellent glory and our supreme good?

How closely does He bind Himself and His Father to His people! His heart centers upon them in this high hour of holy communion with His Father.

"I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.

"Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee.

"For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.

"I pray for them; I pray not for the world; but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.

"And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them."

He prays also for keeping for these disciples. Not only were they to be chosen, elected and possessed, but were to be kept by the Father's watchful eyes and by the Father's omnipotent hand. "And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are."

He prays that they might be kept by the Holy Father, in all holiness by the power of His Name. He asks that His people may be kept from sin, from all sin, from sin in the concrete and sin in the abstract, from sin in all its shapes of evil, from all sin in this world. He prays that they might not only be fit and ready for Heaven, but ready and fit for earth, for its sweetest privileges, its sternest duties, its deepest sorrows, and its richest joys; ready for all of its trials, consolations and triumphs. "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."

He prays that they may be kept from the world's greatest evil, which is sin. He desires that they may be kept from the guilt, the power, the pollution and the punishment of sin. The Revised Version makes it read, "That thou shouldst keep them from the evil one." Kept from the devil, so that he might not touch them, nor find them, nor have a place in them; that they might be all owned, possessed, filled and guarded by God. "Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."

He places us in the arms of His Father, on the boom of His Father, and in the heart of His Father. He calls God into service, puts Him to the front, and places us under His Father's closer keeping, under His Father's shadow, and under the covert of His Father's wing. The Father's rod and staff are for our security, for our comfort, for our refuge, for our strength and guidance.

These disciples were not to be taken out of the world, but kept from its evil, its monster evil, which is itself. "This present evil world."

How the world seduces, dazzles, and deludes the children of men! His disciples are chosen out of the world, out of the world's bustle and earthliness, out of its all-devouring greed of gain, out of its money-desire, money-love, and money-toil. Earth draws and holds as if it was made out of gold and not out of dirt; as though it was covered with diamonds and not with graves.

"They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." Not only from sin and Satan were they to be kept, but also from the soil, stain and the taint of worldliness, as Christ was free from it. Their relation to Christ was not only to free them from the world's defiling taint, its unhallowed love, and its criminal friendships, but the world's hatred would inevitably follow their Christ-likeness. No result so necessarily and universally follows its cause as this. "The world hath hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

How solemn and almost awful the repetition of the declaration, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." How pronounced, radical and eternal was our Lord Christ's divorce from the world! How pronounced, radical and eternal is that of our Lord's true followers from the world! The world hates the disciple as it hated his Lord, and will crucify the disciple just as it crucified his Lord. How pertinent the question, have we the Christ unworldliness? Does the world hate us as it hated our Lord? Are His words fulfilled in us?

"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.

"If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

He puts Himself before us clear cut as the full portraiture of an unworldly Christian. Here is our changeless pattern. "They are not of the world even as I am not of the world." We must be cut after this pattern.

The subject of their unity pressed upon Him. Note how He called His Father's attention to it, and see how He pleaded for this unity of His followers: "And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are."

Again He returns to it as He sees the great crowds flocking to His standard as the ages pass on:

"That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

"And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one.

"I in them and thou in me that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."

Notice how intently His heart was set on this unity. What shameful history, and what bloody annals has this lack of unity written for

God's Church! These walls of separations, these alienations, these riven circles of God's family, these warring tribes of men, and these internecine fratricidal wars! He looks ahead and sees how Christ is torn, how He bleeds and suffers afresh in all these sad things of the future. The unity of God's people was to be the heritage of God's glory promised to them. Division and strife are the devil's bequest to the Church, a heritage of failure, weakness, shame and woe.

The oneness of God's people was to be the one credential to the world of the divinity of Christ's mission on earth. Let us ask in all candor, are we praying for this unity as Christ prayed for it? Are we seeking the peace, the welfare, the glory, the might and the divinity of God's cause as it is found in the unity of God's people?

Going back again, note, please, how He puts Himself as the exponent and the pattern of this unworldliness which He prays may possess His disciples. He sends them into the world just as His Father sent Him into the world. He expects them to be and do, just as He was and as He did for His Father. He sought the sanctification of His disciples that they might be wholly devoted to God and purified from all sin. He desired in them a holy life and a holy work for God. He devoted Himself to death in order that they might be devoted in life to God. For a true sanctification He prayed, a real, whole, and thorough sanctification, embracing soul, body and mind, for time and eternity. With Him the word itself had much to do with their true sanctification. "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified by the truth."

Entire devotedness was to be the type of their sanctification. His prayer for their sanctification marks the pathway to full sanctification. Prayer is that pathway. All the ascending steps to that lofty position of entire sanctification are steps of prayer, increasing prayerfulness in spirit and increasing prayerfulness in fact. "Pray without ceasing" is the imperative prelude to "the very God of peace sanctify you wholly." And prayer is but the continued interlude and doxology of this rich grace in the heart: "I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it."

We can only meet our full responsibilities and fulfill our high mission when we go forth sanctified as Christ our Lord was sanctified. He sends us into the world just as His Father sent Him into the world. He expects us to be as He was, to do as He did, and to glorify the Father just as He glorified the Father.

What longings He had to have us with Him in Heaven: "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me." What response do our truant hearts make to this earnest, loving, Christly longing? Are we as eager for Heaven as He is to have us there? How calm, how majestic and how authoritative is His "I will"!

He closes His life with inimitable calmness, confidence and sublimity. "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."

The annals of earth have nothing comparable to it in real serenity and sublimity. May we come to our end thus in supreme loyalty to Christ.