



WEEK 6: JOHN 17

Scripture: John 17

Instructions: On the first day you pray with this guide, use the whole chapter for your prayer time. Then, highlight the sections, verses, or even phrases that strike you and spend subsequent days going more in-depth into those passages: why is God calling you to focus your attention there? Let these words sit with you even after your prayer time, and let God continue to speak to you through them throughout your day.

Reflection from Archbishop Aquila:

You can watch Archbishop's video reflections at archden.org/easter2021

John 17 is referred to as the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus because it is one extended prayer from Jesus to the Father on our behalf. When you think of the fact that Jesus “raised his eyes to Heaven,” what comes to mind? You might recognize those words from the Mass when the priest begins to offer the sacrifice of the Eucharist. The essence of priesthood, in both the Old and New Covenants, is to offer sacrifice on behalf of the people. Jesus here, as high priest of the New Covenant, is showing us in this prayer what his offering, which will be his own death on the Cross, is for. In this prayer, he lifts his apostles, and by extension his Church through all human history, to the Father.

What is Jesus’ prayer for us? I wish to focus my reflection on how in John 17 he connects the twin calls that all of us are given in Baptism of holiness and mission. We see these two linked in verses 18-19, “As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world. And I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth.”

While sending, Jesus also consecrates them. To consecrate something is to make it sacred, to make it holy, like when a bishop consecrates a new church. To prepare us

for mission, Jesus first makes us holy.

In *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II's document on the mission of the Church, he emphatically makes the connection between holiness and mission. He writes, "A missionary is really such only if he commits himself to the way of holiness: 'Holiness must be called a fundamental presupposition and an irreplaceable condition for everyone in fulfilling the mission of salvation in the Church.' The universal call to holiness is closely linked to the universal call to mission" (RM 90).

Holiness is vital for mission because, first, holiness provides a compelling witness. The conversion God's grace has wrought in our life and the fruits of the Spirit this conversion brings testify to the fact that God is real, and he can change lives. This does not mean we have to first be perfect to share the Gospel; who of us would ever begin, if that were the case? However, it does mean that the witness of our lives should always accompany the profession of our mouths.

Second, holiness is essential for mission because it is growth in holiness that begins to create a burning passion within us to share the Gospel. Often, our fear in being missionary comes from what we are afraid to lose, particularly other's respect and their good opinion of us. The purity of heart that holiness brings allows us to love God and love our neighbor. This love is what compels and emboldens us to be on mission in our everyday lives. "Perfect love casts out fear," (1 John 4:18).

Again, St. John Paul II writes, "Let us remember the missionary enthusiasm of the first Christian communities. Despite the limited means of travel and communication in those times, the proclamation of the Gospel quickly reached the ends of the earth. And this was the religion of a man who had died on a cross, 'a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles!' (1 Cor 1:23) Underlying this missionary dynamism was the holiness of the first Christians and the first communities" (RM 90).

Love provides the impetus for mission. The magician Penn Jilette, of "Penn and Teller" fame, himself a famous atheist, once said in an interview, "I don't respect people who don't (evangelize)...If you believe there is a heaven and hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life, and you think it's not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward...how much do you have to hate somebody to not (evangelize?) How much do you have to hate someone to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?"

On this point, sadly, Jilette is right. We know that the salvation Jesus brings not only makes eternal beatitude possible but also makes life here on Earth joyful. If we see people who do not have the relationship with Christ and his Church that makes both possible, and our hearts are not moved to ask the Lord how we can be part of his plan to bring that life to all, we must wonder how deeply God's love has been rooted in our

hearts.

Our love of God must lead to a love of neighbor that longs to address the spiritual and corporal wounds of the world. We must have courage to cry out to the world, as St. John Paul II did, “It is Jesus that you seek when you dream of happiness. He is waiting for you when nothing else satisfies you.” Our holiness, which is itself love of God and love of neighbor, is what spurs us on to boldly announce this good news to the world, having experienced it first from as a message declared to our entire being from the heart of the Blessed Trinity.

Jesus makes clear in this passage his desire to give his Church the gift of union as well. This gift is a union with each other that then also leads to a union or better put, “evangelical nearness” to the world.

First, it should be clear to us that union with each other as Catholics is a prerequisite for bearing fruit in mission. As Jesus says, “I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.” As Catholics, if we spend our time in silos and warring factions, we will be fundamentally unable to compellingly proclaim Christ to the world and our proclamation will lose its impact.

Furthermore, as Jesus’ priestly prayer demonstrates, the gift of being one with and in him serves the mission that the world will believe in Jesus. Therefore, we too must remember that Jesus’ prayer is not that we be taken out of the world today. With as much confusion and even hostility toward Christian beliefs as we find in the world today, Jesus continues to send us, who have received his word, into the world to bring glory to Jesus and the Father. We do not go out to simply be like the world, but to be a leaven to culture.

On this last point, I urge you not to be intimidated by the world. St. Paul encourages us, “For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control. So do not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord, nor of me, a prisoner for his sake; but bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God,” (2 Timothy 1:7-8) We must take confidence from the fact that the Son of God himself prayed and continues to pray for us, most especially in the Eucharist, that in going into the world, we will be kept from the evil one.

May God continue to bless you abundantly as we continue this celebration of Easter.