

Reflection for the Seventh Sunday of Easter

According to St John, after the Last Supper Jesus gave a long discourse which included an exposé on the new commandment *“to love one another as I have loved you”*. It also included reassurance that he was going to prepare a place for them *“so that where I am you may be also”*, and the promise to send the Holy Spirit, the Advocate. It included the parable of the Vine and the Branches and predictions that the world will hate the followers of Jesus as it hated him before them. Jesus wraps up his lengthy discourse with a long prayer which we have come to know as the High Priestly Prayer, part of which we heard today. This whole long discourse and prayer lasts four chapters, four chapters out of twenty-one, nearly a fifth of the gospel. Although we have only heard part of the High Priestly Prayer today, we will talk about it in its entirety.

This Priestly Prayer starts with the words, *“Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said.”* He starts by praying that his Father will glorify him as the time approaches for his death and resurrection. He then continues by praying for *“the men you took from the world to give to me”* who are to be entrusted to continue his mission and ministry.

Firstly, he prays that the Father *“will protect them from the evil one”* and *“keep those you have given me true to your name.”* Jesus speaks of the world as a place which is hostile to his message and mission, a place which will persecute his followers. The temptation to give up or to reject Jesus will be great. Nevertheless, Jesus prays, *“I am not asking you to remove them from the world”* even though *“they do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world.”* Rather he prays that the Father *“will protect them from the evil one.”*

Jesus goes on to pray not only on behalf of the disciples gathered around him that evening *“but also on behalf of those who will believe through their word.”* He prays for all those who will embrace his word down the centuries. And his prayer is that they will remain united, *“that they may be one like us”*. The unity of the church is to be modelled on the unity of the Father and Son and Jesus’ prayer is, *“just as you are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us.”* The unity of his followers is an important witness if his Church is to have credibility in the eyes of the world. Jesus prays *“that they may be brought to complete unity [and] then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”*

On the eve of his own rejection and painful death by crucifixion Jesus foresaw that life would be difficult for his disciples and followers. But he did not pray that they be spared trials and difficulties, rather that they might remain faithful in spite of them and victorious over them.