

# Sunday, May 16, 2021

## Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year B

### Prayer of the Day

Gracious and glorious God, you have chosen us as your own, and by the powerful name of Christ you protect us from evil. By your Spirit transform us and your beloved world, that we may find our joy in your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

### First Reading: Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

*In the days between Jesus' ascension and Pentecost, Peter oversees the process whereby one of the members of the community of believers is chosen to be the twelfth apostle, in order to fill the vacancy created by Judas's treachery and death.*

<sup>15</sup>In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons) and said, <sup>16</sup>"Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus—<sup>17</sup>for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry." <sup>21</sup>So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, <sup>22</sup>beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection." <sup>23</sup>So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. <sup>24</sup>Then they prayed and said, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen <sup>25</sup>to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." <sup>26</sup>And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

### Psalm: Psalm 1

*The LORD knows the way of the righteous. (Ps. 1:6)*

<sup>1</sup>Happy are they who have not walked in the counsel | of the wicked,  
nor lingered in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seats | of the scornful!

<sup>2</sup>**Their delight is in the law | of the LORD,  
and they meditate on God's teaching | day and night. R**

<sup>3</sup>They are like trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in due season, with  
leaves that | do not wither;

everything they | do shall prosper.

<sup>4</sup>**It is not so | with the wicked;  
they are like chaff which the wind | blows away.**

<sup>5</sup>Therefore the wicked shall not stand upright when | judgment comes,  
nor the sinner in the council | of the righteous.

**<sup>6</sup>For the LORD knows the way | of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked shall | be destroyed. R**

## **Second Reading: 1 John 5:9-13**

*God has borne witness to the gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ. Whoever believes in the Son of God believes in the witness of God and has the promise of eternal life.*

<sup>9</sup>If we receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son. <sup>10</sup>Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts. Those who do not believe in God have made him a liar by not believing in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son. <sup>11</sup>And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. <sup>12</sup>Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

<sup>13</sup>I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

## **Gospel: John 17:6-19**

*In this reading the church hears Jesus' words on the night before his death—his prayer for his disciples and for all who would believe in him through their words.*

[Jesus prayed:] <sup>6</sup>I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. <sup>7</sup>Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; <sup>8</sup>for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. <sup>9</sup>I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. <sup>10</sup>All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup>They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. <sup>17</sup>Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup>As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup>And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

## **Sermon**

Grace and Peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen

Sometime ago I read a fictional series by author Dean Koontz – The Jane Hawk Series. I thoroughly enjoyed it. Jane Hawk, the main character, is on a mission that necessitates leaving her son with trusted friends for an unknown period of time. She is able to visit rarely, but when she does, she holds her son tightly and reminds him of the dangers that lie ahead and pledges to protect him.

Perhaps, you've had a similar experience. Maybe you've been held closely by a loved one and assured that whatever danger was present or looming in the future would pass and you heard pledges of protection. And perhaps you were the one making those very pledges.

“Holy Father protect them, “Jesus prays. When we stop and think about it we may have experienced this holy protection first in our mother’s womb that bore us and with the parents or loved ones who nurtured us. We hold our children close, our neighbors’ children close, in a world in which the evil one seems to lurk around every corner.

Food shortages, war, economic disparity and many other realities cause families to move, leaving familiar places of home. Protect them, protect them, Jesus pleads. In our joy and happiness, our fear and anxiety, our helplessness, when parents or guardians fail, protect them. Jesus, now risen and ascended, asks God to protect us all, that we may be one.

In our reading from Acts today, the early Church is in crisis. Judas, one of the twelve, is gone, and they need a new leader. Peter stands up among the group and addresses everyone as friends. They cast lots – not a lot of vetting or a long, complicated call process. They simply roll the dice, as it were. And in a real sense God is the true gambler who rolls the dice and casts lots – and the lot has now fallen to us, those who gather around the table and God’s word. And to be certain, there is always risk in these things. Whether today or next week or the week after that, we are called for this time and this place to be witnesses to the presence of the grace and hope and resurrection alive in the world now.

Jesus prays to God, “All mine are yours, and yours are mine.” The Holy One guards and protects us now so that we may be one.

There is work to be done in Jesus’ name, and we’re the ones to do it – Jesus’ closest disciples and friends. Someone once wrote, “Life in the present, of course, is not without struggles. Jesus does not ask God to take his disciples ‘out of the world’, or even to protect them from all struggles.”

We gather this week to hear these words of good news, to imagine a joy complete in the midst of a world complicated and filled by disparity, despair, and struggle. Yet through the waters of baptism, we are called into the world protected, and made one. There is no better time to be God’s people.

And that may surely sound strange as we are emerging from a pandemic that has gripped not only our nation but the entire world for over one year. How can this be a great time to be God's people? – you ask.

If you will, imagine with me for a moment or two and concentrate on our gospel text today – Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, as it has become known, which Jesus fervently prayed the night before he was crucified.

It seems evident that Jesus not only knew, but absolutely accepted that his earthly life was quickly coming to an end. And just so, as he prays his thoughts are not on his fate, what has and will transpire, but on others – including you and me. As I read this text, I am humbled to think that some of Jesus' last thoughts and conversations with God the Father concerned believers of all times. Sometimes I stand in awe when I hear the passion in his prayer to the Father that centers around what he desperately wants for us – not himself – but for us, you and me. It's an incredible bit of scripture that points out once again the true heart and nature of Jesus, of his earthly mission and of his absolute dedication to that mission.

It may be interesting to rewrite this solemn prayer given the situation in which we currently find ourselves enmeshed.

Given the state of the world around us: sabre rattling, civil unease and unrest of all sorts, politically – right v. left as we've not experienced it before, and of course navigating an end of the pandemic which has thrown life as we knew it straight out the window. And certainly, we then must deal with COVID on a local, state and international level. The end result is a confusing mixture of strategies and programs that are anything but fool proof, not to mention all the psychological and emotional distress caused by the pandemic and its aftermath.

While the end of the pandemic may be in sight for our nation and other nations, we know that not all nations can be as optimistic as we are.

Allow me to take a great many liberties and rewrite a portion of Jesus prayer for us – modern day disciples who remain subjects of this heartfelt prayer.

Jesus prayed: "I have made your name know to all who have ears to hear. These were among those you gave me from my birth. They are aware the everything I have given them comes from you. And, Father, they know the truth which will set them free to serve and love you and one another.

They understand that I came from you, that you are the one who sent me to teach of your love for all you have created.

Father, as my time on earth is drawing to a close, I truly am no longer in the world, but those who follow me are in the world.

Father, they are currently living with despair, with mistrust, with all manner of civil unrest. They are suffering from a worldwide disease that has taken millions of lives.

They are struggling to return to a new normal, so much in this world has changed so rapidly.

They are confused – there is so much that is false being spread as truth. It is difficult for my followers to have their voices heard and appreciated by those who rule and legislate.

Father, I pray that you protect them so they may be one; that the scattered sheep may heed you, the good shepherd who mourns the loss of one sheep.

As I have lived among them, Father, I protected them in your holy name. I was able to guard them. But now, Father, I am coming to you, even as I speak to you from this world for yet a little while.

Father, I pray that they may have my joy complete in themselves.

Father, I am not asking that you take them from this world, rather I'm asking that you protect them from the evil one who always masquerades as any number of evils.

Father, I pray that you give them the truth – your word – always. May your word of love and truth guide and direct them through the uncertain days in which they live today as well as each day to come.

May they come to love you as you love them. Protect them now and always. Thank you, Father.

Now, I trust that you may continually recognize and appreciate that the prayer before us today was spoken by Jesus to God the Father on our behalf. On our behalf. Just how amazing is that?

I invite you to read and reread our gospel text prayerfully and then make your own attempt to rewrite it – for your specific life situation today.

I'm absolutely certain that the end result will leave you in awe at the love shown for us by Jesus as he was hours away from being crucified.

He is Risen. He is Risen Indeed,

Thanks be to God. Amen

## Prayers of Intercession

*The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.*

Alive in the risen Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, we bring our prayers before God who promises to hear us and answer in steadfast love.

*A brief silence.*

Holy God, in Christ Jesus the joy of the church is made complete. Root the church in your Word and unify us as Christ's body. Send us into the world as your loving people, ready to testify to your Spirit at work. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Mighty God, the world is your handiwork, displaying your creative impulse. Seas teem with life, forests reach up to praise you, and the mystery of life lies deep in the soil. Guard and keep this world for the well-being of all your creatures. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Gracious Sovereign, those who follow your ways are like trees planted near streams of water. Establish the leaders of nations and all in authority in your grace and truth. Strengthen them, so that the people they serve will have abundant life. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Generous Savior, you befriend those who are sick, suffering, poor, lonely, outcast, rejected, or sick. Grant healing and love to all in need (*especially*). Give them tangible signs of your steadfast love. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Creator God, here in this community we share the gift of praying, learning, and supporting one another. Give us thankful hearts as we claim the gifts that are unique to us and keep us from being envious of others with different gifts. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

*Here other intercessions may be offered.*

Saving God, your wonderful promise is the gift of eternal life in Jesus. Through the witness of those who have died in you, strengthen us now in this gift of life. We cherish the memory of your saints (*especially*). Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

In the hope of new life in Christ, we raise our prayers to you, trusting in your never-ending goodness and mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**