

Homily: 7th Sunday of Easter 24th May 2020

We are in a waiting period. Waiting patiently many are having to learn anew in lockdown. The instant society that we had become doesn't easily work in lockdown. Few of us enjoy waiting. But there are times in life for all of us when there is nothing to do but wait.

Spending time waiting is often regarded as a waste of time, we'd rather be doing; we're better busy I usually say: feeling guilty when someone says 'don't just sit there, do something'.

One of the reasons we feel frustrated is because we have no control over what happens. We feel passive and powerless. But other occasions of waiting can be positive, and the Psalmist picks that up in Ps 129: 5, 'My soul is waiting for the Lord, I count on his word.' (A familiar Psalm that begins 'Out of the depths I cry to you O Lord.') Or Psalm 39:1,2 'I waited, I waited for the Lord and he stooped down to me, he heard my cry'. Or Psalm 36: 7 'Be still before the Lord and wait in patience'.

As we wait for more release from lockdown, we are liturgically awaiting the Holy Spirit after the Ascension of the Lord. These nine, novena days.

Our 1st Reading takes us to the Upper Room in Jerusalem. Jesus had instructed his disciples to **wait** there for what the Father had promised. There we find them in continuous prayer, with several women and Mary, the mother of Jesus. Luke, who wrote Acts, has Mary prominent in his gospel in the period before the birth of Jesus, when she was promised the Holy Spirit would come upon her. It is fitting then, that Luke now places Mary in prayer with the others while they awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit. That last picture of her in Acts, Mary, Mother of the Church and our mother, is in prayerful unity with the church, the community.

Prayer is a vital expression of the Church's life and mission in Acts. That is what they were told to do, and little they could do other than to pray.

At all funerals I do say we are here to do two things. One is to give thanks, and the other is to pray, for we can do nothing else for the departed, but be thankful for their life, and always pray for them. Prayer so important. I read

today as I prepared this ‘that the pandemic has seen google searches for prayer rise by 50%, as people turn to God for comfort in times of crisis.’

The Psalm today is one of great confidence in God, no matter how great the difficulties we may have to face. Take that response ‘I am sure I shall see the Lord’s goodness in the land of the living’. Remember we are **ALWAYS alive to God**, ‘our light and our help.’

Suffering again is to the fore in the 2nd Reading, as it has been before within Easter time, as it is through the suffering, passion, death and resurrection of the Lord that victory comes.

This reading reflects a period when Christians were being persecuted just for being Christian. As we know, most persecution of religion today is of Christians across the world. We hold all in persecution in our prayer today.

A truth of the Ascension is that Jesus ever lives now to make intercession for us. St John’s gospel, unlike the other synoptic writers (Matthew, Mark & Luke) does not give what we know as “The Lord’s Prayer,” the Our Father, Paternoster. But John does give us this long prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper, which comes as the climax of the farewell discourses. As ever in John, this prayer can be regarded as a more solemn and soaring version of the Our Father.

Jesus raises his eyes to heaven as he begins to pray. The classical definition of prayer is the raising of the mind and heart to God, as we lift our eyes.

Father expresses in spare and simple words the essence of Jesus’ teaching about God and the central thrust of his mission. The prayer manifests his deep relationship with the Father.

In John’s gospel the constant union of Jesus with the Father is very much emphasised. Having come in human flesh his divine glory was disguised, but now the hour had come for him to be revealed in the light of the Father’s glory, that is, his passion and death, which John sees as glorification.

As the mediator between earth and heaven, as he is about to exercise his priestly role, he prays, before offering himself in sacrifice on the altar of the Cross.

Jesus prays Father, who is as distant as heaven but as near as Father to child; whose name is to be revered but whose providence is to be trusted.

The central work of Jesus was to set up on earth the kingdom of the Father. The kingdom means a society where God is the rule of life. It means that there is bread each day for all; no more injustice, discrimination or selfishness but the fair sharing of the resources of mother earth.

In the kingdom there is full forgiveness and perfect reconciliation; no more tearing apart within us or fighting between us. Kingdom people persevere faithfully as temptation is resisted and evil is totally conquered.

The prayer of Jesus in the upper room repeats the great themes of the 'Our Father', though in John's swirling cycles of thought, rather than the clear simple lines of the Synoptists.

The name which dominates this prayer again is Father. The infinite otherness of God is expressed in the recurring theme of glorification.

Just as the Our Father becomes a prayer for the kingdom on earth, so too Jesus here intercedes for the disciples in the world. Jesus has glorified the Father on earth by doing his will and making his name known. Now that his earthly hour is completed he hands on his mission to the disciples.

The instrument of the kingdom is now the earthly church -in-the-world, and the glory of Jesus himself is now reflected in the works of the church... 'in them I am glorified.' In many forms of charitable service the church brings forth the kingdom.

She also experiences God's forgiveness so deeply that she has a special sacrament of reconciliation to celebrate it. Desiring to share the joy of reconciliation, she preaches peace and encourages an understanding that is greater than hurt: a blessing that overcomes cursing.

Prayer is the fruit of our awareness of God's involvement in all that is happening in life.

The gospel selected interrupts the prayer rather abruptly, but ends on the theme of the fidelity of the disciples and their unity in God's name – two items that occur also in the other readings

In lockdown time, as his faithful disciples, may we use some of that time for more earnest prayer especially the Novena to renew the face of the earth.

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