

Homily notes from Canon Philip Dyson
Sunday 16th May 2021 - 7th Sunday of Easter

Readings (Year B): 1st: Acts 1:15-17. 20-26. Psalm 102. 2nd: 1 John 4:11-16. Gospel: John 17:11-19.

It was very encouraging during the week when at least 3 people spoke to me in thanksgiving for answers to prayer. We know prayer is fundamental to any faith, and oh how often we pour out our hearts in prayer, sometimes wondering if anyone is listening; asking what is going on: yet in faith and trust handing it over to the Lord.

Today's gospel is part of the longest and most penetrating of all the prayers of Jesus in the gospels. St John places it immediately after the three great chapters of discourses in which Jesus strengthens the disciples with the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit as he prepares for his own physical withdrawal. The Upper Room where the Last Supper was held becomes a symbol of prayer: Jesus raised his eyes to heaven. The classical definition of prayer is the elevation of the mind, heart and soul to God.

Prayer the threshold between earth and heaven. Our feet are still entrenched in this world but at the threshold of prayer we knock on the door of heaven. The faithless mind, having had no contact with heaven, would have judged that the programme of Jesus was crashing about him and that all was falling apart. But in prayer raising his eyes to heaven, Jesus is returning to the centre where in fact all is one.

There is a serene unity between Father and Son beneath the storms on the surface of life. The divine perspective of Jesus transcends the small minded plotting of enemies. Nothing, not even betrayal and death, can break the inner core of unity.

Jesus prays that his disciple too will share in this inner centre of knowledge and love.

Prayer is the fruit of our awareness of God's involvement in all that is happening in life. Jesus' prayer is not self-centred but he rejoices

that the glory of the Father will be reflected in his own glorification and that would be extended to all those that you have given to me, namely his disciples.

The prayer in this instance is for those who have accepted his message. While Jesus is going to the Father the disciples would still remain in the world with all its trials and tribulations.

His prayer for them is expressed in 5 petitions:

That they would be **faithful**, unlike Judas

That they would be **one** in the likeness of the union of Father & Son

That they would experience **divine joy**

That they would be **protected from the evil one**

That they would be **consecrated in the truth**

We the disciples of Christ today, remain in the world. When we experience failure or fear, when everything is crashing down around us, then it is time to raise our minds to the Upper Room and connect with the Lord.

In these days of pressure and depression, of stress and isolation, we need time and make time to be with the Lord. All too easily we let ourselves be submerged by the noise and pace of life. We need that inner stillness where we are aware of the divine presence.

I did like this little piece I read in a commentary on this passage; *“If you want to spend your life alternating between anxiety and depression simply let the bad news set up squatter’s rights in your mind. In the basement of bad news there is little light and no hope.”*

Like Jesus at the hour of climax we must go to the Upper Room and stay at the threshold of God in prayer. Prayer brings increasing awareness of a relationship with God. It expands our space and extends our vision of life. It grows in the intimacy of knowing God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. It wells up from silent depths to eloquence in praise and petition, in thanksgiving and contrition.

Lift up your hearts: we lift them up to the Lord

Canon Philip Dyson