

## Easter 7A (6/5/11 – *Christ Our High Priest Prays for Us*)

In the Name of JESUS. [Amen]

Have you ever noticed that each year on this *Seventh Sunday of Easter*, we have a reading from John 17? This first year – Year A in the Three-Year Series – we have verses 1–11. Next year we will have verses 11–19. And the third year it will be verses 20–26. That is by design, of course. No matter which Gospel we are primarily hearing in a given year – Matthew, Mark, or Luke – *Easter tide* is filled with readings from St. John’s Gospel. The *Second Sunday of Easter* is always from John 20 – *St. Thomas Sunday*. The *Fourth Sunday* is always *Good Shepherd Sunday* – with a reading from John 10. And the *Seventh Sunday* – the last Sunday of *Easter tide* ... after Christ’s *Ascension* and before celebrating the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on *Pentecost* – is from John 17: *Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer* (as it is called ... ever since Luther).

There are similarities of circumstances between what Christ’s Apostles would soon experience and what His disciples experience until the Savior’s return. It is for the time after His *Passion*, *Resurrection*, and *Ascension* that Christ our dear Lord prays for His disciples here. He has been telling His Apostles about His betrayal, rejection, and visible departure from them by way of the Cross that will soon come to pass – about laying down His life for them. But He has also promised His glorious return after a little while – by way of His *Resurrection* from death and the grave – and His sending of the Holy Spirit. Christ has clearly warned them of the persecution they will suffer ... and of their own failures to remain faithful to their Lord.

In the *Church Year* we stand between the time of our Lord’s *Ascension* and His outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the *Feast of Pentecost*. The forty days of the Savior’s post-resurrection appearances ended on Thursday. *God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet* [PSA 47.5]. The *Paschal Candle* has been extinguished and returned to its usual place beside the Baptismal Font. We celebrate *Pentecost* next Sunday. In the Church in general – in our Christian lives – we stand between the *Ascension* and the *Second Coming* of Christ. *Pentecost* has already happened. We rest on the Savior’s promise that He has not left us as orphans, but indeed **continually** comes to us – by the Holy Spirit – through the gracious means of Word and Sacrament.

Now that the Lord Christ has taught them as a faithful Prophet and Preacher of God – proclaiming to them both Law and Gospel ... sin and grace ... death and life – the Savior prays for them (and all His disciples of all ages) as a great and merciful High Priest ... before He ascends to His throne as glorious and eternal King. Like all of Jesus’ Word in the upper room and on the way to Gethsemane before He was betrayed, this prayer of our Lord is meant to bring comfort to His disciples – those who were with Him ... and even us who follow so many centuries after. Let us hear this prayer rightly that we might learn to pray ... and be comforted in our own lives ... as we await the great Day of our Lord’s eternal presence.

Jesus’ prayer consists of three parts really – a good example for us. First, our Lord ***lifted up His eyes to heaven*** [JN 17.1]. In the beginning of prayer our hearts and minds and spirits are directed toward God – calling upon His Name in every trouble ... giving Him praise and thanks for His manifold gifts [SCI.2]. Next, our Lord prays for Himself – which teaches us that it is good and right and God-pleasing *that with all boldness and confidence we may ask our dear Father as dear children ask their dear father* [SC III.1]. Last, Christ prays for His disciples – teaching us to look at the needs of those around us ... and pray that everyone may be saved [LW v.69 p.20].

In the second part, our Savior allows us to “eavesdrop” on a conversation between the Son and the Father. He gives us a glimpse into the internal workings of the Holy Trinity. The Son is self-humbling toward the Father. Christ prays to Him ... asks of Him. Jesus asks the Father to ***glorify*** Him ... so that He in turn might ***glorify*** the Father. We know, of course, what this means – Christ’s suffering and death upon the Cross. Jesus makes this clear when He says in chapter 12: ***The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified*** [JN 12.23]. Just a few verses later He indicates by what death He would die: ***And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself*** [12.32]. This is the divine meaning of glory – the very Son of God gives His life for the life of the world ... the Son becomes sin so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him [2COR 5.21] ... the Creator redeems His creatures by uniting Himself to them in the Flesh and dying the death they have earned. This is true glory – God has saved us to be His own, *not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death* [SC II.2]. This is divine glory – the Son of

God *give[s] eternal life to all whom* the Father has *given Him* [JN 17.2].

Notice also how our Savior defines *eternal life* in His prayer. *And this is eternal life, that they know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom You have sent* [17.3]. Eternal life is defined by **relationship** ... by the believer intimately knowing *the only true God* – the Father Who in love sends His Son to give His life for the world ... the eternal Son Who humbles Himself and sheds His holy Blood to give His life as a ransom for many ... and the Holy Spirit Who calls us by the Gospel and grants and sustains saving faith. *Eternal life* is **knowing** and believing the one true, gracious and loving God Who has completed all the work necessary for the salvation of the whole world of sinners. Thus, Jesus says elsewhere: *Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has eternal life* [JN 6.47]. *Eternal life* begins with faith **already** here on earth and continues in heaven where we shall know and see God perfectly ... face-to-face ... **forever**.

In the third part of the prayer, Jesus prays first for His eleven Apostles (Judas had already left) ... and for all believers (including us). Jesus prays for us because He knows our weaknesses – how easily we forget His promises ... His work on our behalf ... His love and forgiveness and grace in time of need. The disciples will be scattered ... they will run away and hide in fear. This *Eastertide* we have already heard about our Savior's gracious post-resurrection appearances to bring comfort to His fearful disciples. We know that we are like them – and thus need Christ's grace.

Even our Savior's earlier words of prayer to the Father could be viewed in such a way that they might cause doubt ... and fear. I know that I have not glorified God with my life as I ought. Instead I have mired His holy Name by my sins. I know that I have not known the one true God as I ought. I have neglected to keep His holy Word – or as Luther explains in the **3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment**: *We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it*. I know that I have not made God's Name known as I ought. I have been silent when I should have spoken – neglected to invite family and neighbors to hear and see Christ in this place. My sinful deeds have obscured the bright Name of Christ that I wear by virtue of my Baptism. Our Savior prays earnestly and faithfully to the Father – but my worship and prayers have faltered. Christ commends His disciples to the Father's keeping – but I

have failed to commend fully to God even those I love ... as if I did not trust His protection and keeping.

But Christ, by His Word and example, would teach us to rest in the care and protection and keeping of the Father – for the Triune God has done all things for us. Christ speaks of His *hour* and *glory*. It is the Cross. By His glorious Cross, He has put our death to death by His own death. By His Cross, He first has kept and obeyed and completed the Father's Word and Will concerning us and our eternal salvation – and then gives us His **Own** glorious keeping of God's Word by clothing us with Himself in Holy Baptism and faith. By the Cross – and also His *Resurrection* and *Ascension* – Christ gives eternal life to us and to all believers.

In full assurance, our Lord entrusts us and all we need to His gracious Father, saying: *Holy Father, keep them in Your Name, which You have given Me, that they may be one, even as We are One* [17.11]. And the Father keeps us and protects us by continually placing us **in** His Name through the working of the Holy Spirit. We are baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. At the beginning of every *Divine Service* the Holy Name is invoked by us and upon us. All that we hear and receive in the *Divine Service* comes from God. It is His Word that we hear and repeat back to Him in the liturgy. It is His forgiveness that we receive in His Name in the Holy Absolution. It is His Gospel that is preached and by which the Holy Spirit works in us to create and sustain our precious faith. It is in the Name of the LORD that Christ comes to bless us with His Body and Blood in the Sacrament. And, finally, it is in the Name of the LORD that we receive the threefold blessing before we depart.

Behold, then, how *Christ Our High Priest Prays for Us!* Christ shows Himself to be our great Intercessor – first by interceding for us with His life and Cross and Resurrection to give us eternal life ... and then eternally in heaven. *Who is he who condemns? It is Christ Who died, and furthermore is also risen, Who is even at the right hand of God, Who also makes intercession for us.* [ROM 8.34] *Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them* [HEB 7.25]. Behold, how *Christ Our High Priest Prays for Us!* Also this Word shall not return to Him void.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]