

June 1, 2025 – Acts 1:12-26, Revelation 22:1-20, John 17:20-26

There's something deeply comforting about knowing that someone is praying for you. Maybe it's a friend who texts you and says, "I included you in our church's prayer chain." Maybe it's your grandmother who you know faithfully includes your name in her evening prayers, every single night. Maybe it's a fellow Christian who quietly takes you aside, puts their hand on your shoulder, and prays for you, right then and there.

When someone says, "I'm praying for you," it means you are not forgotten. You are not alone. Someone is carrying your burden, even for a moment, before the Lord.

And yet, even the best earthly prayers are limited. We forget. We grow weary, like the disciples in Gethsemane. We may not know exactly what to pray. Our prayers for one another are real and important, but they always feel a little imperfect. A little incomplete.

That's why today's Gospel reading is kind of astonishing. Because here we do not hear the prayers of a friend or a pastor or a fellow believer. We hear the prayer of Jesus Himself, the night before He died. And who does He pray for? "*I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word.*"

That means... you. That means me. Jesus is praying for us. Before the cross, He has you on His heart and on His lips. The Savior of the world is interceding for His Church. Not just for those first disciples, but for every future believer who hears the Word and believes. That prayer was spoken once, long ago, but it still rings in the ears of our heavenly Father. And it brings you comfort and strength even now.

So today we rest in that prayer of Jesus. We listen to what He asked. And we find that He was praying not for our comfort or success or an easy life. No, he was praying for our unity. That we would be one. Not just organizationally. Not just outwardly. But one in Him. United in His glory. United in His Word. United in His love.

This prayer for unity is not a vague dream. It is not a sentimental wish. It is a real request from the Son of God to His Father. A prayer that was heard and a prayer that was answered. But not in the way the world understands unity. Not with institutional alignment. Not with sweeping compromise. Certainly not with declarations of diversity or inclusion. No, Jesus prays for a unity rooted in glory: in His cross, in His resurrection, and in the truth of His Word.

Jesus said: "*The glory that You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one even as We are one.*" But what kind of glory is that? Because it's certainly not the kind of glory the world desires. It's not the glow of achievement, influence, or admiration. It's not a platform. It's not popularity. The glory of Christ is unlike any glory the world has ever known. Because it's the glory of the cross.

In John's Gospel, Jesus consistently connects His glory to His suffering. When Judas leaves the upper room to betray Him, Jesus says, "*Now is the Son of Man glorified.*" His glory is His humiliation. His power is His sacrifice. The glory the Father gave to the Son is the glory of redeeming sinners by His blood. And that's the glory Jesus gives to His Church.

And this means that our unity is not founded on status or strength or shared social agendas. It is founded on something far stranger in the eyes of the world: the glory of God's mercy toward us. The Church is made one in Christ, not by any human effort or agreement, but by the suffering of Jesus for the sins of the world. That's the gift He gives to you: a glory that doesn't come from a cheering audience, but from a cross, surrounded by insults and mockery.

So if the Church appears weak or small or foolish in the eyes of the world, that really shouldn't surprise us. It only shows that our unity is not from men, but from Christ. A unity the world cannot create and a unity the world cannot destroy. It is received, not earned. It is a gift, not a reward. It flows from the font, from the altar, and from the preaching of the Word. Places where the crucified and risen Lord gives you His very self.

This is where true unity begins. Not in us. Not in our willingness to get along. Not in our striving or good intentions. It begins in Christ. In the glory of His suffering and His blood. In the name into which you were baptized. In the body and blood given and shed for you. Jesus doesn't say, "I hope they find a way to get along." He says, "*I have given them the glory that You gave Me.*"

Christian unity is not something we create. It is something we receive. The Church does not manufacture unity. The Church is one in Christ, because Christ has made it so. We are not trying to become the Body of Christ. We already are the body of Christ.

Our problem is that, in our sinfulness, we simply forget about it. We forget the glory that binds us. We forget that we have been brought together, not by flesh or by our own effort, but by a crucified and risen Lord.

And that's why Jesus also prays: "*I do not ask for these only, but for those who will believe in Me through their word.*" This is the second thing we need to realize: Christian unity is preserved by the Word. By the apostolic Word, handed down through the Scriptures and preached into the ears of sinners.

It's no accident that we hear the reading that we do from Acts today, where the apostles select someone to replace Judas. The Church in this reading is in a time of preparation. They are preparing to receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. But they realize that, first, they need an apostolic foundation.

And so Matthias is chosen to be a witness to the resurrection. That's his primary qualification. This apostolic office is not just organizational. It is one of the foundations of the church throughout history. We believe in Jesus through their apostolic word. The same Word that Jesus entrusted to them, and which the Holy Spirit carried to the ends of the earth.

And that Word is what unites us now. Not trends. Not preferences. Not culture. The Word. "*Sanctify them in the truth,*" Jesus prayed, "*Your word is truth.*" That is how the Church remains one: not by suppressing differences of opinion, but by clinging to the truth of Christ's death and resurrection. By hearing the apostolic Word and receiving the gifts that flow from it.

Even now, in this very moment, the Church on earth is united to the Church in heaven by that same Word and by the Spirit who works through it. You are gathered today not as individuals, not as spectators, but as members of one Body. Joined to the saints in glory. Joined to Christ, who is your Head.

But his prayer goes further. Jesus says: "*I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, may be with Me where I am, to see My glory.*" And here's the final message for us: the unity Jesus prays for is not only for now. It reaches into the future. Until that moment when we see Christ face to face.

That's what our reading from Revelation shows us. The Church is not walking toward destruction, but toward life. Toward the river of living water. Toward the throne of God and of the Lamb. And there, "*they will see His face,*" John writes.

That's the real end of the story. That's the goal of Jesus' prayer. He wants you with Him. Not just in thought. Not just in spirit. But in resurrected flesh, seeing His glory with your own eyes.

Until then, we live by faith. We live by the promise of His Word. We wait. And while we wait, we love one another, because Christ has loved us. We bear one another's burdens. We weep with those who weep. We forgive as we have been forgiven. We confess together. We sing together.

Maybe most of all, we pray together. We pray for one another, just as Jesus prayed for us. That's the unity Jesus prayed for: unity that flows from Him and returns to Him.

So hear His prayer. Trust it. You're not alone. You are one in Him. One in His cross. One in His glory. One in His Word. And when He comes, your joy will be complete. "*Surely I am coming soon,*" He promises. And so we, as the Church, reply with one, united voice: "*Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.*" Amen.