

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN - PART XX

THE HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER OF JESUS AT THE END OF THE LAST SUPPER

I. Chapter 17 gives the final prayer of Jesus before the passion begins. As the Catechism states, it "sums up the whole economy of creation and salvation." Catechism of the Catholic Church 1758.

A. At the beginning, Jesus turns from instruction to prayer along the lines of a Jewish high priest. However, here instead of preparing to sacrifice an animal, He is preparing for the sacrifice of Himself.

B. Jesus begins by looking up to heaven, as He did when raising Lazarus. See John 11:41. See also Matt. 14:19; Mark 6:41 (Jesus lifting His eyes to heaven for the multiplication of the loaves); 1 Chron. 6:13 (Solomon stretching his hands to heaven at the beginning of his prayer for the consecration of the temple); Ps. 123:1 (lifting one's eyes to the mountains seeking assistance from God.)

C. Moses also prayed at length at the end of his life, but it was a prayer remembering God's providence and praising Him for His purifying judgment. Duet. 32:1-44. Here, Jesus remembers God's calling, but looks forward more to the sanctity that He Himself has brought and will bring, through His disciples to the world.

D. This prayer fulfills the petitions of the Our Father. See Catechism 2750.

1. It begins with the address to the Father, who sends His Son from the heavens.

2. It then calls for the glorification of God through knowledge of His name in verses 1-6, 12-13, and 26.

3. Although not using the word Kingdom, the prayer reflects over and again the theme of the glory and unity of God's people, and prayers for the conquest of the world through this glory and unity. See John 17:1, 5, 9-11, 18-23

4. The prayer describes how Jesus has accomplished the will of the Father by glorifying Him, by guiding and protecting the disciples, and by proclaiming the Father's world. The disciples likewise are sent by Christ to be one with each other in the love of the Trinity that they may reflect on earth the order of heaven. See John 17:15-23.

5. The provision of daily bread is not directly mentioned. But Jesus does pray that He be in His disciples bringing them as one. See John 17:23, 26. This presence of Christ that brings about unity is accomplished above all by the Eucharist, the bread of angels. See Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 10:16-17, 11:23-34.

6. The forgiveness of sins is also not directly mentioned. However, again it is implied by the fact that Jesus guided His disciples despite their flaws, see verse 12, and asks the Father to make them perfect, see verse 23. Their forgiveness of each other is implied in the prayers that they also be united together. See John 17:11, 22-23; cf. Eph. 2:14-18.

7. Jesus also prays that as He has protected and guarded them from evil, see verse 12, the Father will do the same, see verse 15.

E. This prayer has an analogy in the Preface before the Eucharistic Prayer at Mass; it is a prayer recounting salvation history in preparation for the fulfillment of it.

II. The beginning of the prayer is a recounting of Jesus' saving work through the glorification of God and the revelation of His name and His words to the disciples, and a call for that glory to be shown now above all at this, Jesus' final hour.

A. As Fr. Ray Brown says, "Here, more than ever, we cross the threshold of eternity." Fr. Brown, The Gospel and Epistles of John 84.

B. Jesus recounts that God gave Him authority over all things that He may give the world knowledge of God and therefore eternal life.

1. The authority here is the authority to overcome the darkness and distance from God that has afflicted humanity from the beginning. It is an authority that both judges and saves.

2. The knowledge of God is not merely intellectual, but a personal experience and encounter. As Adam and Eve fell through their desire to be like gods by knowing evil as well as good, see Gen. 3:5, so now Jesus will give the real likeness of God by knowing God through His Son.

- And as Adam and Eve fell through disobedience, it was fitting that Jesus should restore humanity and glorify God

by "accomplishing the work" that God gave Him. See Phil 2:6-11.

- This knowledge implies deep unity, see e.g., John 5:20, 1 Cor. 15:12, 1 John 3:2, and fulfills the promise of the preface of John. See John 1:18.

C. Jesus refers to the fact that He has always been with the Father by asking the Father now to show forth that glory that was always there from the foundation of the world.

- Jesus now makes available to all the glory of God that the author of the Book of Wisdom sought through the knowledge of Wisdom. See Wis. 7:25.

D. Jesus then brings in the theme of how He revealed the name of God and so brought the disciples to God. The name of God is saving, and Jesus reveals the full power. See also Ps. 9:16, 124:8, 135:1; Joel 3:5.

- In some ways the name of God, as Yahweh (I am who Am), Lord, and even Father were already known. However, Jesus in His life revealed what those names really meant. God is utter mystery as the source of all things, Himself having no need of explanation. In Jesus, we are brought more into this mystery of God beyond all human knowledge. See Eph. 3:14-19. In Jesus, we sense the glory of God as Lord, but also as citizens of His kingdom. See, e.g., Eph. 2:19-21. Likewise, God had revealed Himself as a Father of the Jewish people and of some individuals, such as kings, see, e.g., 2 Sam. 7:14; Hos. 11:1; but now Jesus reveals God as Father of the Son from all eternity, and as a loving Father to each person. In this mystery, glory, and love of God, the Apostles have been called together.

E. On a similar point, Jesus then recounts how the word of God, given to the disciples through Jesus, has brought them as an offering to God. The word of God, which cannot but have an effect, see Is. 55:10-11; Jer. 1:9-10, here above all calls the disciples together as God's representatives.

III. Jesus then offers His petitions for the Apostles and for all who believe through them, before concluding with a triumphant declaration that the name and the love of God will be made known to all who believe.

A. Jesus asks that His disciples have four gifts: (1) that they have unity in the name of God; (2) that they be protected in the name and word of God; (3) that they have the joy of God; and (4) that they be consecrated in the truth.

1. Jesus begins by praying for the disciples in the world, as distinguished from the world itself

- The world is not evil in itself, but as Adam and Eve were meant to subdue the world, so now the Apostles, consecrated in God, are meant to show forth the glory of God in the world. The world will believe, as indicated in verses 21 and 23, if the disciples are faithful and united.
- The idea is that the world becomes good or evil according to how people use it.

2. Jesus then prays for the unity of His disciples. He clearly meant for His Church to be one, and the Apostles here were meant to hold the Church together, as they would in Acts of the Apostles. See Acts 15:1-35. Likewise, the unity of the church is founded on the Apostles and prophets (likely meaning the inspired writers.) See Eph. 2:19-22.

3. Jesus then asks God to guide them since He will not be as visibly present. Until Christ the high priest and sacrifice gives His life, none of the Apostles would be attacked because they were needed to start the Church and because the forces were arrayed against Jesus Himself. But now when Jesus rises and ascends into heaven, the forces of the world, backed by the fallen angels, will be arrayed against the Apostles and other disciples themselves.

- Jesus Himself has preserved all except the "son of perdition." He is lost "that Scripture may be fulfilled." That phrase does not mean that Judas had to betray Jesus and be lost, but rather that Jesus had to be turned over and crucified, and Judas provided the way for this fulfillment to occur.
- The disciples will be in the world, but not of the world. They will be of heaven meant to show forth this kingdom on earth. See 1 Pet. 2:9. The world, meaning those who do not see above things of this world, cannot understand them, and will, therefore, persecute them, for the flesh ever wars against the Spirit. See Gal. 5:17.

4. Jesus prays that God's word, revealed by Him, will bring them to His joy, which He senses even as He is about to be crucified. There is a thrill, and excitement at the union with God, not only despite, but even because of their sufferings for Christ. Thus, the Apostles rejoiced at being able to suffer for Christ. See, e.g., Acts 5:41-42; 2 Cor. 5:16-18. The joy of the Christians, in the context of persecution, both protects them against falling away because of persecution and should be a witness to the world. See Phil 4:4-9; Col. 2:24.

5. Finally, Jesus asks God to consecrate them in His word, which is the essence of all truth. The idea is that they are now being set aside by God, as the prophets and priests of old were set aside, to bring the faith into the world. They are to take the presence of Christ, given to them, and bring the faith to others.

B. Jesus then prays for all who will believe through them. The prayer is especially for unity, which will lead the world to believe and will bring them to perfection. This unity is to be brought about by the glory of God shining forth. This glory, which we will only see in fullness when we are with Christ, will unify the followers of Christ.

1. St. Paul also speaks of baptism, the Holy Spirit and the Eucharist bringing about unity, as they did at Pentecost and in the Church immediately thereafter. See Acts 2, 10:44-49; 1 Cor. 10:14-17, 11:17-12:11; Gal. 3:27-29. They are or (as in Pentecost) begin the sacraments of initiation.

2. The unity with different gifts allows the individuals in the Church to arrive at completion through each other, all guided by the Spirit. See, e.g, 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:1-16.

3. The Church, as a united band, shows forth the fullness of grace and can, therefore, convert the world.