

ECHOING GOD'S WORD
in
THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY
SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
May 21, 2023

Lectionary Readings:

Acts 1:12-14	The Church awaits the coming of the Spirit.
1 Peter 4:13-16	We suffer with or without Christ.
John 17:1-11	Christ is glorified in the faith of the disciples.

John:

St. Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria (414-444 CE), refers to this section of John's Gospel (John 17:1-26) as the Priestly Prayer of Jesus. A Lutheran theologian (1600 CE) calls it the High Priestly Prayer. Jesus spends more time talking to God at the Last Supper than he does talking to his disciples. He prays for himself (verses 1-5), for his followers (6-19), and for all who will come to believe (20-26). That is a priestly function: to pray.

Some have suggested that this is John's version of the Lord's Prayer. There are certain parallels: Jesus addresses God as *Father* (vv. 1,5,11,21,24,25); *the holy Name of God* is referred to (vv. 2, 11, 12, 26); *thy Kingdom come* (v. 1); *on earth as in heaven* (vv. 4&5); *lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil* (vv. 12 & 15).

Since we say there is no eucharistic institution at the Last Supper in John, perhaps we missed it; it was right here all the time. This is the Mass in Jesus' own words: an offering and intercession to the Father. We could try to imagine a Sunday assembly with the presider taking these words from the mouth of Christ, at least as a preface to the Institution Narrative. What would this Mass sound like? What mystery of faith would we be celebrating if not the dying and rising of Christ, leading to his return to the Father in glory and anticipating his return to judge the world?

To know God and the one whom he has sent, Jesus Christ, has very little to do with intellectual knowledge. It is not merely a thing in the head. *To know* in Scripture involves the heart and the whole being. It is a matter of penetrating into the whole being of the one we know: to know from the inside. How can this not be *eternal life*? If we know God and Jesus Christ in this way, we have penetrated into the very heart of God and have been transformed into his likeness. That is eternal life!

All mine are yours and yours are mine! "Omnia mea tua!" Bishop Louis Walsh of this diocese had chosen these words from John's Gospel as his episcopal motto. It was engraved on the banner of his coat of arms. A story is told about Father Reardon, a former pastor at St. Joseph Church in Gardiner. He had built a palatial rectory for himself there; Bishop Walsh was not pleased; he would have preferred that father build a parochial school. (It is not clear whether father might even have built this while the bishop was on one of his frequent trips to Rome!) So, Father Reardon had the bishop's coat of arms engraved in the stone over the front entrance to the rectory. There it stands to this day: "Omnia mea tua." ("All that's mine is yours!")

The High Priestly Prayer of Jesus is not like other Gospel material. It is not a story; the Sunday assembly has a hard time following the flow of these proclamations from John. Children are bored! Youth roll their eyes! Adults leaf through the missalettes! What is all this about? It is not a

parable; it is not a sermon. The other Gospels simply tell us that Jesus went off by himself to pray. We are seldom let in on the content of his prayer (except in the Garden of Gethsemane). Here we have it! Jesus' Prayer to the Father! It is really a *revelation* of who God is, who Jesus is, and who we are.

If the priest or deacon had any guts at all, he would shout this prayer over the assembly until the rafters shook, until we shook in our boots! Can't you just hear the roar in that Upper Room as Jesus pleads with his Father to hear him as he is taking leave of his family and friends? The whole universe is being shaken to its foundations, and we are bored when we hear it?

Acts:

The earliest community of Jesus' disciples truly is a community: they wait together in prayer. The community leaders are there; women are very prominent in their midst (they get a special mention); the mother and other family members of Jesus are there. And they pray. That is, they are attentive to God. They do not waste their time alarming something beyond their strength. They do not indulge in idle self-pity. They do not give themselves over to blaming others for their situation. They wait for God! But it is an active waiting, not just passing the time of day.

Peter:

Finally, the Letter of Peter is not just about baptism and its consequences. It becomes personal. We have a choice as to why we suffer: Either we have done wrong and are being punished for it or we suffer simply because we belong to Christ! We can choose not to suffer in the first way by simply doing no wrong. We have no choice about the latter: We suffer because Christ suffered. We who bear his name will undergo the same experience he did. God will be faithful to us as he was to Jesus.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Was there a "fire in the belly" of your Gospel proclaimer this weekend? Did you notice that he wanted to pound the pulpit with the Book of Gospels and pound the heads of the congregation? Did you notice that he wanted this High Priestly Prayer of Jesus to have an effect on heaven and earth? Maybe you did not, because he didn't!

2. How can we be looking forward to the renewed coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost if the Church does not take seriously the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus? Do you have a sense that your parish, your family, your Small Christian Community, has taken this prayer seriously? Are you not yourselves a "priestly people"? Don't you have a right to shake the world (and heaven, too!) with this prayer?

3. In what sense do you *know* Jesus Christ? How can we know God if we do not know Jesus Christ profoundly? Did you realize that it was rather simple to *know* Jesus Christ? The Father has revealed him to us. Pay attention!

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

It has been said that we can only get into the mind and heart of Jesus if we get into his works and do the things he did to build up the kingdom of God. Christian service will open up the treasures of God's heart to those who are willing to serve, in any way at all.

PRAYER

**Protect me, Lord God!
I run to you for safety,
and I have said,
“Only you are my Lord!
Every good thing I have
is a gift from you.”**

(From Psalm 16, Contemporary English Version)

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

Some have questioned the use of the term “Catholic Doctrine” for this section of *Echoing God's Word*. A few words of explanation might be in order.

I know I cannot meet the expectations of all who read these notes. Each has a point of view. Each comes to the reading with prior experiences of God's word and of Church teachings. Some have felt hurt by the Church; some seem to have been denied their God-given dignity; some do not trust this Church that we used to call Holy Mother. They do not like the words we use because these often serve to recall pain and alienation. I try to be sensitive to those persons. I know I do not always succeed. I regret that.

“Doctrine” simply means “teachings.” I try to reflect on the official teachings of the Church as they are suggested by the Scripture passages we hear that particular Sunday. I do not take those “teachings” out of thin air. I draw them from Church sources: first, from the ancient creeds. These are by far the most important sources of Church doctrine. Their use in the liturgy places a special character on them: they can only be approached with the faith of a praying community. These are not dry academic texts; they express the living and breathing faith commitment of the disciples of Jesus Christ. Secondly, I draw them from the *texts* of the official prayer or worship of the Church. The Church prays in a certain way because it believes in a certain way. “*Lex orandi, lex credendi.*” (“The law of prayer is the law of faith.”) Then also, I draw from Church councils, the *Revised Code of Canon Law*, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Private revelations and appearances even of the Blessed Virgin Mary are not sources of Church teachings. These may confirm the teachings, but they do not ground the teachings.

Some would prefer that I use the word dogma instead of doctrine. That word is not used so freely today. Many would reserve it for the more central or core teachings. Pope John XXIII said that there was a “hierarchy” of doctrines: some are more essential than others. For example, it is more important to be committed to the belief that Christ is of the same “substance” as the Father than to believe that holy water can ward off spiritual evil. Not all Church teachings are of equal value for salvation. “Dogma” scares off some people; so I do not use it in these notes, although it is a perfectly legitimate word. In the proper context, I would use the word. I reject the idea that the Church cannot and should not have an official doctrine or teachings. The Church does not merely throw Bible passages out at the world. The Church interprets and proclaims. It has a right and a responsibility to do so. The Church is conscious of a certain development in its doctrine. Peter did not know he was infallible! Guided by the Spirit, the Church articulates its faith ever in new ways. Faith does not change; doctrine evolves.