

7 Easter C 2019 SML  
JN 17:20-26

Jesus' time of teaching about the Father's kingdom had drawn to an end. There would be no more opportunity to hold a leper in His hands or sit in Mary's home in Bethany and talk of His Father's wonders, at least not in this body; not in the way He had grown accustomed.

Our Blessed Lord had returned to Jerusalem for His final visit. This evening's/morning's gospel finds Our Blessed Lord at table with His disciples at the Last Supper, hours from yielding Himself to His executioners, His heart deeply troubled. He stood at the threshold of the greatest act of love and trust our world would ever behold, and He knew in doing so He would be consumed. What should He do? Would He trust His Father's love and continue the journey, or would he cut it short and beckon the angels to set Him free?

Perhaps the most powerful lesson Jesus taught His disciples about prayer began in the verse following this evening's/morning's gospel, by polling how they thought He should pray: "(Fellas,) What shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'?"

Perhaps there were nods around the table as they all acknowledged how good that sounded to them. That's how we're used to praying. In moments of trial and pain, it is natural even for the unbeliever to cry out for help: "Save me, Lord!" If you get me out of this, I will serve for forever."

This past Monday, we celebrated Memorial Day, honoring, praying with and praying for our country's heroes who made the ultimate sacrifice. This Thursday, we will remember the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the D Day invasion. So so many on the Normandy beaches were added to the number we honored last Monday. This story printed in last Sunday's Wall Street Journal:

My friend once told me, in describing that day, of a moment when, as a US Navy ensign, he was piloting his packed landing craft toward Dog Red sector on Omaha Beach. They'd cast off in darkness, and when dawn broke they saw they were in the middle of a magnificent armada. Nearby some light British craft had gone down. Suddenly a landing craft came close by, and an Englishman called out: "I say, fellows, which way to Point du Hoc?" They pointed to the right. "Very good," said the Englishman, who touched his cap and sped on. My friend remembered the moment with an air of "Life is

haphazard, a mess, and you're in the middle of a great endeavor. But you maintain your composure, keep your spirit. In other words, "Father, it was for this reason that I came to this hour. Glorify your name."

So, yes, the disciples understood this type of prayer well enough, but Jesus wanted them to learn a better way. Even when Jesus' life was at stake, Jesus was tuned into a better frequency.

At the crucifixion, the thief on the left, "If you are the Christ save yourself and us . . . Save me!"

The bystanders at the crucifixion, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! He saved others; He cannot save Himself . . . Save me!"

"(Fellas,) What shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?'" (Forget that). "No. it was for this very reason I came to this hour." What Jesus wanted personally wasn't in the picture. He was focused elsewhere – on the purpose that transcended His personal happiness. And His purpose was prayed for when Jesus said, "Father, glorify your name."

In this brief exchange, you learn everything you will need to know about prayer and what it means to follow God in this life. For in every situation you'll ever encounter, you will be

offered two options in prayer, “Father, save me,” or “Father, glorify your name!” One will lead you to frustration and disillusionment, the other to the greatest wonders in God’s heart. This is where today’s gospel comes in when Jesus prays to the Father, “I have given them the glory you gave me.”

Jesus’ teaching about prayer seemed to be incredibly simple: ask for whatever you wish and be assured that the Father will give it to you.

It gets complicated only when our experience with prayer falls short of this ideal. Why would Jesus tantalize us with such outlandish promises only to leave us disappointed in so many of the things for which we ask?

It’s not so difficult to understand why He would ignore our more selfish requests. Even the disciples had to learn this. Instead of calling down fire from heaven as James and John had asked, Jesus taught them such ideas came from the wrong place. And when James and John asked for a seat to His right and His left, Jesus taught them there was no place for anyone to set themselves over anyone else.

It’s far more difficult to understand why our prayers for other people in pain and misery go unanswered. Was Peter responding in any way less than love when he forbade Jesus

to go to Jerusalem to face His executioners? I doubt it. Yet Peter's entreaty was met with the harshest rebuke. "Get behind me Satan! You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

Peter did not understand God's higher purpose in the cross Jesus would suffer. For God to have answered Peter's prayer, God would have aborted the very act that would save Peter from himself. Peter did not understand that he was giving voice to Satan's attempts to discourage Jesus from obeying the Father. It was a "save me" prayer, or rather a "save Him" prayer that like most "save me" prayers, resisted God's purpose rather than serve it.

"Father, glorify your name" is the prayer God always answers. "Father, may the purpose for which You have created me and placed me where You have in the world be completely fulfilled in and by me." That's the prayer that disarms our self-interest and asserts our trust that the Father who made us and who loves us so deeply knows us better than we know ourselves.

Pray this prayer in every situation faced.

When God wanted to teach me to trust Him more, I prayed He would fix things so I wouldn't have to.

When God wanted to lead me in the fullest participation of what He made me to be, I prayed He would just make me happy.

When God wanted me to change my character so I would represent His heart to others, I wanted Him to leave me the way I was.

I'm so glad He won, more often in spite of my prayers than because of them. We want God to win. We really do. We want Him to use everything in life to shape us to be more like Him so He can fulfill in us the purpose for which He made us.

So when I didn't get the job I wanted, the raise I deserved, or the medical report I had hoped for, "Father, save me," or "Father, glorify Your name!"

When faced with malicious gossip, or Facebook lies, or the object of someone's selfishness, "Father, save me," or "Father, glorify Your name!"

When we find ourselves in the dark storm surrounding us, and when trials overwhelm us, "Father, save me," or "Father, glorify Your name!"

The prayer is "Father, glorify Your name," every time!