

Sermon for the Seventh Sunday of Easter

'The glory that you have given me, I have given to them.'

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Our Lord prays a very strange prayer, only part of which we are given in our Gospel reading for today.

We should not be afraid of saying it is strange. To deny that would be to deny to obvious and make ourselves both fools and liars.

He prays that may *all be one*. This seems simple enough, unity is good. Unity in the Church is even better, and perhaps more applicable today than in any time in the past, seeing as how fragmented the Church has become, both in its shattering into many denominations, and in the discord and strife that often strikes each of our individual congregations.

But then the Lord continues, *'that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you*. What exactly does it mean for us to united with each other in the same way that Christ is one with the Father? Jesus is one with the Father in a truly singular, unique, uncopyable way. Exactly what does it look like for us to be one as *the Father and Son are one*?

And yet the prayer goes on, that we must be united like the Trinity is united *that we might also be in the Father and the Son*. Now it seems, we are no longer talking about earthly unity among Christian brothers and sisters, but we are talking about something theological: our union with God.

And to top it all off, this confusing unity we are to have is for a reason, *that the world may believe that you have sent me*. So this unity is for the good not of the Church, or at least not merely of the Church, but for the good of the unbelieving world.

It is a very strange prayer.

Yet the key to understanding it, at least in part, is in the following verse. *'The glory that you have given me I have given them., that they may be one, even as we are one.'*

Therefore it is this *glory* that creates this unity, both between each other, and between God and us; it is this *glory* that will testify that Jesus is sent from the Father.

What, then, is this *glory*?

Well, put simply, it is everything that Jesus has. It is everything that Jesus is. And at this point of the Gospel of St. John, that 'everything' is nothing less than suffering and death. The suffering and death that Jesus much go to in Jerusalem. The cup of wrath He must drink. For it is written that the *Son of Man must first suffer at the hands of many, and be crucified, and receive his glory.*

So what is it to be united to Christ's glory? It is to suffer all the wickedness and sadness and malice and betrayal of this life. In this suffering, all Christians become one, because we all become partakers of the Passion of Jesus, *completing the sufferings of Christ*, as it is written in St. Paul's epistle.

There is much sadness in this life. There is much suffering. There is much evil. The medieval Church believed that between heaven and hell there was a place called Purgatory where imperfect Christians would be cleansed by fire, purified by pain, to be made ready for heaven.

The Reformers did not reject the idea of Purgatory, the idea that we must be made pure through suffering. Rather, they said something very simple: Purgatory is real; but Purgatory is not something we experience after death. Purgatory is this life.

Indeed in this life, we are baptized into Christ, and so we are baptized into *a life like his*, and also, *a death like his*. We are baptized into the agony of the cross.

And by this agony, this daily struggle against sin, death, and the devil; against the temptations of the world and the temptations of the flesh; in this struggle, we become one with Christ. In this agony, we share His glory.

If Christ in His glory is a Suffering Servant, we too will become suffering servants, for we are in Him, and He in us.

It is true that Jesus our Lord is a Suffering Servant. But it is not true that He is only a Suffering Servant. For behold it is written by the very same St. John that wrote this Gospel that Christ is *'the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.'* *'The root and descendent of David, the bring morning star.'*

Indeed, His glory begins with suffering, but ends with dominion, to rule over all things in justice, and in majesty. And this also shall be the glory you are united to. The glory He prays for you have in unity within Him.

Therefore it is written *'blessed are those who wash their robes that they may enter the city by the gates.'* For the faithful shall indeed be *clothed in glory* as the *holy ones of God*.

And both agony and ecstasy will be a testament to the unbelieving world. For in suffering, the world looks upon us, and sees that our faith seemingly does us no earthly good. It does not make us richer. It does not make us more successful. It does not improve our chances on the stock market. They laugh at our faith, saying to us just what they once said to the Lord *'He would save us? He cannot even save himself.'*

And yet when we are clothed in light on the last day, a wear the crowns of true sons of the almighty Father, this too shall be a testament to them, for on that day, they will have no doubt that, indeed, *the Christ has come*.

In this life, we preach the Gospel to all who will hear, that *the full number of God's elect may be saved*. *The Spirit and the Bride says 'come.'* Those who hear say *'come'* Come to the Gospel and the Kingdom it proclaims, where there is *water without price*. Come, and suffer with God. Come and die with God. Come, and be raised in God. Come, and ascend to *my Father and your Father, to my God and your God*.

Come, and come quickly, for *'behold, the Lord is coming soon, bringing recompense with him, to repay each one for what he has done.'* To bring into the heavenly Jerusalem His faithful clothed in white robes, and to cast out *the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolators*. Draw close, while the

Lord is near. For His Final Judgement is no myth, no story, no simple babbling of words. It is as real as His suffering, death, and resurrection, for He Himself informs us:

'Surely, I am coming soon.'

Amen, Come, Lord Jesus.

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Preached by Pastor Fields

*Sermon Texts: Acts 1:12-26; Revelation
22:1-20; John 17:20-26.*