

Our Praying Savior

7th Sun. of Easter – 05/12/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: John 17:11b-19 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 15, [Jesus prays for His disciples & all believers after them,] **“I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.”**

v. 17, **“Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”**

Introduction

✘ Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

✘ I think it's safe to say that parents are always concerned about their children – as are pastors and others who love them as well – especially when those children leave the nest.

→ After all, God entrusts those young souls to the parents and the Church from the time of their birth and baptism; to nurture them; to teach and raise them in the truths of the Christian faith. But then after 18 years or so, it's time for them to venture out from under a parent's loving wings to spread their own wings as independent adults in a very daunting and challenging world.

✘ Even so, no matter what age; no matter what stage of life a child may be in, one of a Christian mother's primary activities is always to be in prayer for her children.

→ Why? Because even though she, along with her husband worked, with God's power and guidance, to faithfully bring that child up in the Lord Jesus, they are still, even though they will argue to the death that this is not the case – they are still very vulnerable to the many dangers and temptations and misleading falsehoods out in the world.

→ Whether it is in college, trade school or the workplace, it is a given fact that these new young adults will now hear many new and different voices and messages from their friends, professors, bosses, co-workers, roommates and of course social media telling them that their parents were/are just plain wrong on a whole variety of issues; that their pastors and even the Bible (i.e. God) is wrong as well.

→ And this fact is a great concern for any mother or father; for aunts and uncles; for pastors and many others who truly love and care for these young believers who are being sent out into the world. So they/we pray often and fervently to our Lord and Father for their protection; for them to remain unified with Jesus and His Church in the one truth of salvation that comes in Jesus alone.

✘ The Gospel Reading before us today shows us that it's not only parents and pastors and others who are concerned about the vulnerability of Christians going out into the world, but Jesus Himself – the very Lord of the Church, He also cares greatly, not only for our children, but for all of us as His children of faith.

→ Just before His betrayal and death, we hear Jesus in the Upper Room praying to His heavenly Father. He's praying for the dear children entrusted to Him – for His disciples and “for all who will believe in [Him] through” the saving Word that they will preach and pass on to the generations after them (Jn. 17:20). That's you and me, isn't it? Jesus was praying 2000 years ago for us, today!

→ And this prayer, which is often called Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, is actually a demonstration of what Jesus is up to all the time since. You see, Jesus praying for us that night, before His crucifixion, teaches us that our Savior is still praying for us every moment right now as He is the only true “mediator between God and men” as 1 Timothy 2:5 tells us.

I. He is praying for our protection

- ✘ This is actually quite amazing considering all that Jesus was going through at the time! Here He is, praying to His Father about other people while He is in the last and most difficult days of what we call His state of humiliation.
 - It was during the years that Jesus did His saving work on earth that He “humbled Himself” (Phil. 2:8) not only to become a human man, but also to voluntarily chose not to always and fully use His divine attributes; His powers as God.
 - At times though, He did use those attributes, especially when they were needed to save us. One of those attributes was what we call omniscience; the fact that Jesus knows all things. And here in Jesus’ prayer we see Jesus using His omniscience to know that this was going to be the night when He was going to be betrayed; to know that the very next day He would suffer an excruciating death by crucifixion.
- ✘ Knowing all of that, what was Jesus concerned about? Not himself, but His disciples and us. These are the ones that He has nurtured and cared for from the moment of their infancy in the Christian faith.
 - So, because He knew He was physically leaving His children, Jesus wanted His Father in heaven to be with them; to protect them; to “keep them from the evil one” (v. 15). Jesus knew full well how dangerous things would be out from under His loving wing; that the world actually already hated them, He says in verse 14, because they were God’s children; because they belonged to Christ and not to the world.
 - It’s always been a part of our sinful human nature to think that we are stronger and better than we really are; to think that “no one will be able to control me; influence me or sway me from the truth”. It was there in the Upper Room, at the same time – either just before or just after Jesus’ prayer that Peter assured Him, “even though [these other disciples] fall away, I will not” (Mk. 14:29).
 - But Jesus knew better. He knew that Peter would betray Him three times the very next day. He knew that the world is controlled by the prince of this world, the devil himself. And Satan has only one goal, to lead God’s children away from Him. Jesus knew that His disciples would be especially vulnerable in the coming days, weeks and months after He was no longer with them in the flesh. He knew the devil’s attacks were coming. So He fervently prayed.
- ✘ It’s interesting to hear Jesus speak like that of a loving parent whom God entrusted with the care of these first Christian believers. Jesus did everything in His power to keep them safe, which is saying a lot because another of Jesus’ divine attributes is omnipotence; being almighty.
 - Granted, the almighty Christ could have protected His children by simply taking them out of this evil world. But that wasn’t the plan. Instead, He prayed for them in verse 15, “I do not ask,” Father, “that You take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the evil one.”
 - What do you think of that? Jesus considers prayer to be the better protection!
- ✘ We’ve called this prayer Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer because it reflects His role as our priest; our “go-between”. That’s the job of a priest in Holy Scripture; to be the intercessor for the people. Why? because people are sinful and unable to save themselves, no matter how strong or good they think they may be. We all need someone to represent us before God.
 - The earthly high priests were sinful as well. They experienced the wages of their own sin, which is physical death, even as God anointed and empowered them for His purposes.
 - But our ultimate high priest, Jesus, is perfect and sinless. He did not deserve to die. But because of His love, He chose to die the death of a criminal in our place; the death we truly deserved.

- ✘ That was the sacrifice our great High Priest offered up with His prayer to the Father. And the heavenly Father heard Jesus' prayer because of His sacrifice; because He was His own beloved Son.
 - ➔ Yes, God the Father heard the prayer, but how did He respond? Did He protect His children? Did He keep them from the evil one, as Jesus prayed?
 - ➔ Yes! Jesus was Himself the answer to His own prayer. First, God's wrath toward all sinners was satisfied by Jesus' death on the cross. The disciples were forgiven; the required penalty for sin was paid.
 - ➔ Second, when Christ rose on the third day, the ultimate enemy, death had been defeated. That means that death can no longer bully any of God's children. They might die physically, but they are protected by God.
- ✘ So, what about Satan and his minions? Christ's victory conquered them and yes, they know full well that they've lost the war against God.
 - ➔ But that's how diabolical the devil is. As the prince of this world he is still doing his very best to harass and lie to and destroy as many of God's believers as he can. That's why God has dispatched the Holy Spirit through baptism and faith to be with God's beloved children; to live actively within them as they struggle against evil everywhere it exists in this world. The Holy Spirit works to strengthen and sustain Christians in their faith and thereby preserve their lives.

II. He is praying for our unity

- ✘ On top of that Jesus prayed for the Father not only to send the Holy Spirit into His people's hearts, but that they would also have fellow believers with them for mutual consolation, encouragement and strength.
 - ➔ That's why Jesus prayed that His children might "be one" as He and His Father "are one" (v.11). One of the devil's sneakiest tricks is to try to destroy Christ's Church by breeding division and factions among Christians.
 - ➔ But the fact is, even Satan and hell cannot stand; cannot hold any person's soul in his grip against the true Christian Church that is united by God Himself. You see, true unity is not something that any man or group of humans can bring about. It exists only by God's powerful work in and through His perfect Word of truth.
- ✘ That means there can only be one perfect truth! So, if any person or any group tries to say that "truth is up to each individual person" or there is more than one absolute truth regarding God and salvation, then they are sorely misunderstanding the very definition of the concept of "truth".
 - ➔ Jesus declares in verse 17 that the only way His disciples; the only way that we can be sanctified before God is when we are perfectly united in His Word of truth; that is the entire Bible, from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21. Every single word of it is The Truth.
- ✘ This is the very reason that God gave us His Word; the reason that He worked throughout the centuries, inspiring His prophets and apostles and believers through the Holy Spirit to write down and record His saving Word in Scripture; so that when the devil and his servants throughout time and around the world either attack God's truth or try to deceptively wiggle into people's hearts and minds and slowly pull them away from Jesus, we will always have the one absolute and always perfect place to determine what is true and what is not.
 - ➔ In our Epistle Reading today; in 1 John 5:9 the same John that recorded Jesus' prayer here in our Gospel sets the faithful example for how we must react if any person or group tries to get us to believe something different than the truth that God has given us in the Bible. John says, "If

we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that He has borne concerning His Son.”

→ In other words friends, who are you going to believe regarding what is true and what is false; people or God; the One who made us and all things or the ones who were made?”

✘ It's like the time that a brother said to his sister, “You know that Mom doesn't really love you. She hasn't loved you since the day you were born.” The girl ran away in tears to her mother to ask if this was true. But she quickly, and now boldly came back to her brother and said, “You told me a lie. Mommy just told me herself that she loves me. And she said to tell you she was there when I was born and you were not. So there.”

→ Being unified in the truth is no more difficult than that. No matter who or what the source of information is that you are considering, we must always; together go back to our perfect God; to His one and only “word of truth”. Don't let Satan; don't let anyone else twist or change God's words to mean anything other than what His Word says, and you will be united with Him and with His Church today and into eternity.

Conclusion

✘ So rest assured my fellow children of God. Jesus, our Savior not only prayed for us, but He continues to pray for us right now as He sits at the right hand of God the Father, imploring Him to protect and to unify us.

→ Jesus not only protected the disciples by His saving work in their place, He is protecting you and me by the same work in our place too. He not only bound the first Christians together in the unity of His truth; He still unites us as brothers and sisters in Christ in the same truth that does not change with the shifting winds of this world or the deceptive tricks of the evil one.

✘ No, our praying Savior will never ever abandon us. He is with us in His Word; with us in our baptism and when we celebrate the Lord's Supper in His body and blood to strengthen us and unite us in His sacrifice for our salvation.

→ So whenever we face difficulty or struggle with questions or doubt, not only is He praying, but He is working and He is coming to bring us into His very presence. And we know this is true because Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.*