

Lesson 14

Seventh Sunday of Easter

The Holy Gospel: John 17:1–11

What is called Jesus' High Priestly Prayer provides the Holy Gospel for this Sunday in all three series of the Three-Year Lectionary. His instructional discourses in the Upper Room concluded, Jesus turned to prayer, praying aloud so His apostles could be strengthened by His words and by the mood they displayed.

Jesus said to His Father, "The hour has come." The hour of the culmination of His ministry, of His reason for coming into the world, of His giving Himself as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, was at hand.

215. How did Jesus refer to what lay ahead of Him and what it would mean for Him? (See Philippians 2:5–11; Revelation 5:11–14.) How would the glorification of the Son glorify the Father?

216. What, according to Jesus, is the key to knowing the only true God and enjoying eternal life with Him?

Having joyfully rededicated Himself, Jesus turned to prayer for those with Him in the Upper Room. "I have manifested Your name to the people whom You gave Me out of the world." God is known and revealed in part by many names in Scripture, such as ____.

217. What name for God did Jesus point to that expresses the new relationship we have with Him through faith in His Son? (See Matthew 6:9; John 20:17.)

Today's feminist movement suggests that calling God "Father" might be sexist and that we might just as appropriately call "her" "our Mother in heaven."

218. How might this influence our view of God and our relationship with Him?

219. What is the full, peculiarly Christian name for God that Jesus gave us, and what does it proclaim about God? (See Matthew 28:18–19.)

Jesus acknowledged that His disciples were a gift from His heavenly Father and said that He had led them to confidence in Him by giving them _____. It was for them that He was praying, because though He was returning to His Father, they would remain in the world with work to do for Him. He asked His Father to _____ them by the power _____.

220. What was to be a result of their being protected by the power of God's name?

Jesus based His confident request on a sweeping statement: "All Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them." This makes the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus very powerful. We are listening in as the Son of God, in His humility as the Son of Man, exults in His coming to be our Savior, and then we hear Him pray for us that we be protected and made one in Him.

221. How does our High Priest implement what He prayed for in our lives?

The First Lesson: Acts 1:12–26

222. How did the apostles occupy themselves as they waited for what Jesus promised them? Was the upper room where they were staying the same room in which Jesus had instituted the Lord's Supper and later appeared to the apostles as the Risen One?

The group in the upper room included women who had traveled with Jesus and the apostles. Only Mary the mother of Jesus is named.

223. Jesus' brothers were there. Who were they?

The Gospels tell us that earlier the brothers of Jesus had not been believers. They were convinced by His resurrection. Paul later said that the risen Jesus had appeared to James, who in time became the acknowledged head of the Church in Jerusalem (see 1 Corinthians 15:3–8; Acts 15:5–21).

The Day of Pentecost was ahead, but first came a time of preparation as the apostles and the others waited for what Jesus had promised them. They joined constantly in prayer, as we have seen. Peter "stood up among the brothers" to recommend that Judas Iscariot be replaced by someone to fill out the number of apostles. "Brothers" is used here for the first time in Acts, but later it was the standard term for the community of Christians. In Jewish tradition, it was the men who counted as the congregation in the synagogues. Today we would say "brothers and sisters."

224. Why did Peter and the others think it was important that there be twelve apostles?

Peter used two Scriptures from Psalms to validate the action as God's will. The first is from an imprecatory psalm in which David was calling for God's judgment of those bringing him distress (see Psalm 69:22–25). Peter applied it to the property purchased by the chief priests with the "blood money" (Matthew

27:6) they had paid Judas. The second is part of a psalm in which David tells what his enemies were saying about him (Psalm 109:6–8).

225. How do you feel about Peter’s appropriating of passages of Scripture and applying them out of context to the situation they were considering? What qualification was considered to be essential for nomination as the twelfth apostle?

Two men met this qualification. Their names were written on small stones and put into a clay jar. After prayer for God’s guidance, the pot was shaken until one stone flew out, bearing the name of the one God had elected. Matthias was chosen in this way.

226. Why do we not imitate the first Christians (and the Old Testament people) and make our decisions and elect people by casting lots today?

The Epistle for the Day: 1 Peter 4:12–19; 5:6–11

Peter wrote to Christians in Asia Minor who were beginning to feel the pressure of official persecution. Emperor Nero had declared Christianity to be an illegal religion. Church tradition says that later his opposition led to the martyrdom of Peter and Paul in Rome. Emperor worship was rising—an attempt to hold a decaying empire together. To refuse to acknowledge the emperor as a personification of the divine spirit of Rome meant political and economic disadvantage and even the threat of execution. Christians found themselves facing a choice between confessing “Jesus is Lord” and burning incense to the emperor as divine.

227. Why did Peter say their suffering and being insulted for the name of Christ should not surprise them “as though something strange were happening to you”? (See John 15:18–21.) Why should Christians rejoice when circumstances come to them in which they “share Christ’s sufferings”?

228. Why is it appropriate that judgment begin with the family of God?

229. What circumstance have you experienced in your life that forced you to stand up and be counted as a Christian?

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God.” Peter is not saying that God is the cause of His people’s suffering. But he is reminding us that God’s hand is involved. He *allows* circumstances, and He *uses* circumstances to _____. And Peter wants us to know that the devil can be at work in the same circumstances to _____.

230. How can we effectively resist the devil and learn to cast our anxiety on God? (See Philippians 4:4–7.) How does the fact that other Christians throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of suffering affect us?

231. What assurance does Peter tell us we may have in all of this?

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*O King of glory, Lord of hosts, uplifted in triumph far above all heavens,
leave us not without consolation but send us the Spirit of truth
whom You promised from the Father; for You live and reign with
Him and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

The Holy Gospel: John 17:1–11

215. Jesus referred to the hour that was near as His glorification because through it He would accomplish what He came to do and would be restored to full enjoyment and use of His divine glory—also now in His human nature. The One who sits on the throne, whose name is above every name, is none other than our Brother, Jesus. Glorifying Jesus glorifies the Father because it was the Father’s love and mercy toward sinners that prompted Him to send His Son to be the Savior. The Son’s carrying out the task in love for His Father surely brought glory to His Father.

216. Jesus said that the key to knowing the only true God is knowing Jesus Christ, whom God has sent. God’s investment of Himself in the saving work of Jesus was a total investment. He did it because He is God, and He is God because He did it—acting in complete demonstration of His character. Jesus’ request was not made for His own sake but so the Father would be glorified and His disciples’ faith would be strengthened.

Some biblical names for God: Sovereign Lord, Yahweh (I AM), Creator, Holy One of Israel, Israel’s Husband, Israel’s Righteousness, Israel’s Shepherd, Spirit of God, Redeemer, Holy Spirit, and so on.—all providing some insight into God’s person and will.

217. Jesus invites us to call God our Father. This says He is the Source of our lives and also assures us of His continuing love and care.

218. God is spirit and has no sex or gender. How we view Him, however, does influence how we see Him acting toward us. Knowing Him as Father emphasizes His relating to us in ways that are traditional for fathers—providing for us, protecting us, caring for us, disciplining us, asserting His good will for us. Societies who have thought of God as feminine have tended to a pagan association of God with the forces of nature and have emphasized dependence on the fertility of “mother earth.” Moreover, Scripture clearly refers to God as “He” and “Him,” and it is not given to us to question how God chooses to present Himself.

219. The peculiarly Christian name for God, given by Jesus when He commanded Christian Baptism, is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This proclaims God to be Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier—God over us, God for us, and God in us.

Fill-in Answers: Jesus led His disciples to confidence in Him by giving them the words His Father gave Him. His miraculous signs impressed them, but it was His teachings that deepened their faith. They told Jesus, “You have the words of eternal life.” Jesus’ prayer moved to His request that His Father keep them by the power of His name.

220. The result of the Father’s protecting us by the power of His name, His revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ, is that we see ourselves as His children and also see one another as brothers and sisters in His family. This is the “family” unity for which Jesus prayed. It leads to mutual respect and active love for one another.

221. Our High Priest implements what He prayed for by asserting His redemptive love for us and for all our fellow Christians as we fellowship around Word and Sacrament.

The First Lesson: Acts 1:12–26

222. During the forty days that were concluded by Jesus' ascension, the apostles no doubt occupied themselves with various pursuits. They were not always together. Peter and others even went fishing. But in the wait for Pentecost, Luke listed the eleven apostles and those who waited with them and tells us they "with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer"—no doubt praising their living Lord and asking that His promise of power in the Holy Spirit be fulfilled. Note that some were known by two names. Bartholomew is called Nathanael in John's Gospel; James son of Alphaeus is James the Younger in Mark; Judas is Thaddaeus in Matthew. The upper room that was their meeting place may or may not have been the same room in which Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper and came to them on Easter Sunday. Many think it was in the home of Barnabas's sister, John Mark's mother, and that it became the regular meeting place for the apostles and others.

223. Opinions vary. They include the views that they were sons of Joseph by a former marriage; cousins of Jesus; sons of a half-sister of Mary; and the most ancient, and now the most modern, opinion: they were sons born to Joseph and Mary after Jesus (see Matthew 1:25). Whatever the exact relationship, the important thing is that they were now believers in what Christ had done for them and for us.

224. Remember, Jesus Himself had chosen twelve to be His apostles. Twelve was the appropriate number; it matched the twelve patriarchs and the twelve tribes of Israel. The twelve apostles would become the "patriarchs" of the new covenant.

225. We surely must recognize that these passages were drawn out of context and applied in a rather loose fashion to the situation. We do the same with phrases and sentences of Scripture at times. Jesus did it Himself (see Matthew 26:31 in relation to Zechariah 13:7–9). The apostles were led to see that the entire Old Testament was written with an eye to the Messiah and His kingdom, so they were able to see phrases as prophetic of circumstances in the life and ministry of Jesus. (Compare Matthew 1:22–23 and Isaiah 7:10–17; Matthew 8:16–17 and Isaiah 53:4; Matthew 12:15–21 and Isaiah 42:1–4; John 19:28–29 and Psalm 69:21; John 19:36 and Exodus 12:46; John 19:37 and Psalm 34:19–20.) The qualification for nomination was "one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when He was taken up from us." No novice would do. Personal contact with Jesus was necessary, for the elected apostle would "become with us a witness to His resurrection."

226. This method was not repeated again in Scripture and does not seem to have had a further place in the many decisions made by the Early Church. Today, we take our concerns to God in prayer, study His Word, and rely on His forgiving grace in Christ as we in Christian freedom make choices in this life.

The Epistle for the Day: 1 Peter 4:12–19; 5:6–11

227. Being asked to suffer for Christ is not a strange thing because Jesus Himself predicted that just as He would be rejected and suffer at the hands of unbelievers so also would His faithful followers. Instead of being surprised when this happens, we are encouraged to rejoice because our identification with Him in suffering for His name underscores our identification with Him in His glory. Suffering for the name of Christ validates the fact that we are bearing that name faithfully.

228. Judgment that begins with the family of God separates the men from the boys, as it were. Note that Peter backs this up with Scripture. Testing, to an unbeliever, means nothing more than an inconvenience or an irritation, but to a believer, testing gives an opportunity to show he has not received the grace of God in vain but is ready to serve Christ's purposes also in times of stress and difficulty.

229. Some in your group may tell of circumstances in which God allowed them to be pressed so that they would stand up and be counted as a Christian. Be ready to share an experience of your own.

God's hand is behind every circumstance in life in a permissive sense. He does not cause evil, but He allows it; He does not cause sin, but He permits it. God allows and uses circumstances to exalt us at the proper time. In the same circumstances, the devil is at work to devour us.

230. To resist the devil effectively, we need the full armor of God so that we make our stand in the Lord's strength (see Ephesians 6:10–18). We can make it a practice to cast our anxiety on God by doing that in our prayers, as Paul says in Philippians 4:4–7—praying specifically about what is troubling us or tempting us and consciously turning the matter over to Him for His action. Instead of fighting with God over the circumstances that He allows to come into our lives, we can remember that He is at work for good in everything, and we can anticipate the blessing that will result. Paul's "with thanksgiving" suggests that we might even thank God in advance for the victory that He will win for us and share with us. Then the wondrous peace of God will guard our hearts and keep us from undue fretting about circumstances that God, in His good will for us, has well in hand. That other Christians experience the same kinds of suffering encourages us to see that it is not an unusual Christian experience. God is not just singling us out for it. Others experience it and endure. By God's grace and power, so can we.

231. The ultimate assurance is that while we may have to suffer a little while, God Himself will restore us and make us strong, firm, and steadfast—ready, by His grace, for life in His kingdom here and in the Kingdom to come.