

P Christ is risen!
C He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today like any Sunday, we begin with a Trinitarian Invocation. We invoke the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and in doing so, we invoke the presence of the Triune God in whom we worship and glorify. This Trinity is the very nature of God in our Christian church. We believe and we *confess* the nature of God that exists in three *coequal, coeternal, and consubstantial* divine persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

In the relationship of these three natures we worship one God in three persons, not one individual God. We come to know this God through the love God has revealed to us in Jesus Christ, who is God's only Son. It is the Son, Jesus Christ who has made God's name know to us as we hear in our Gospel today. We in turn experience this God in the love and care we share with others, when we are sent into the world according to the Gospel. Through our faith that has been poured into us by the Holy Spirit we are in relationship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

But as we look out at the world this notion of experiencing God through the love we share with one another flies right out our windows as we barricade ourselves from the world in the safety of our individualism. Are we then, as a society, a collection of community interactions or are we becoming an abstract form of social cohabitation? Have we become conditioned by our culture to simply "put up" with others where we live in order to cohabit in this world instead of interacting with others and developing relationships and a true sense of community?

With the decay of our communities, social groups, clubs, activities, the decay of religion, along with the rise of smart phones and the Internet, our sense of self evolved into our search for individuality rather than community. Within the breakdown of community and working together, we are facing increasing isolation, and we are seeing more suicides, self-mutilations, and mental illness rising to epidemic levels in our teens, and we are seeing addictions to things that we never knew or even imagined we could even become addicted to and our response is one of indifference, frustration, cynicism, and we retreat into our private worlds by isolating ourselves from it all. Information, regardless of its truth or legitimacy now impacts our consciousness, and our interactions with others...confrontation is confused with conviction and being provocative is confused with being bold and brave. From our private worlds we portray ourselves as victims and isolate ourselves and then claim that "individualism" is good for society because it keeps "me" safe. Individuals then claim the freedom to pursue their private satisfactions independently of others, to do, to act, and to speak freely with no regard or respect of others. For us today, our freedoms emphasize our individual achievement and self-fulfillment instead of the greater good...this, I believe, is the world that "hooray for me" has brought about.

The church *gives us* a strong sense of moral responsibility, NOT JUST a strong sense of morals, a strong sense of *moral responsibility*, NOT JUST to ourselves, but responsibility to others as well. But now that moral responsibility seems to be molded by self-help entertainment and preaching that is focused favorably for me so "I" can use "my" faith to point out the sin and the

evil in others...this is not moral responsibility. This is just a faith in a god who carries out my vengeance, finds favor in what I find favor in, and dislikes all that I dislike. Simply put, faith becomes my power to condemn others and to step on others in order to elevate myself.

St Augustine reminded us long ago that:

“If you believe what you like in the gospels, and reject what you don’t like, it is not the gospel you believe, but yourself.”

As I look at the world and all the hatred and distrust, it seems as if we have rejected all virtuous value in the world leaving us to only see value in ourselves. This is not the prayer of Jesus that we listened to in on in this Gospel lesson appointed for us today. The church, and all the people who embody Her are sent into this environment to love, not to hate, to embrace, not to reject, to develop relationships, not to isolate.

Today we shift gears in our Gospel lesson to the final part of the Farewell Discourse. In this final section of the discourse, we hear Jesus praying for his followers, NOT instructing them as he did earlier. In the earlier parts of the Farewell Discourse, Jesus instructs the disciples and instructs us...people of faith, God’s children, how to live in community with one another by serving and loving one another.

Today in our Gospel lesson we listen in on Jesus praying for the *unity* of the faith community in this Farewell Prayer or the High Priestly Prayer, as it is known. Jesus prays to the Father that his followers "may all be one as we are one" and that "the love with which you love me may be in them, and I in them". In this prayer we listen and hear that Jesus, God’s Incarnate Word, loves us so much that he intercedes in prayer on our behalf, even when death looms large before him.

The shift from the Farewell Discourse to the High Priestly Prayer is revealed when Jesus speaks to God rather than to the disciples. In the discourse Jesus is preparing the disciples for his departure and their lives in his absence. In this prayer today Jesus speaks exclusively to God and prays for the life of the faith community. The future that Jesus is addressing is what will sustain a faith community.

This prayer models how a faith community is to understand and receive its identity in the world...despite the world’s attitude toward caring for the neighbor or toward the notion of community and others. We, as a faith community and or a community in general, are NOT identified as an individual, we are identified as a group of people living together, sharing a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals. This community as we learn today through the prayer of Jesus Christ, interacts and is sustained by relationships not just within the community, but also the relationships we develop beyond a community. And at the very center or the very heart of the faith community is God, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, not just an individual God but a Triune God.

At the very start of this High Priestly Prayer, that is not part of our appointed Gospel lesson Jesus’ prayer begins:

^{17:1} After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, ² since you have given

him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.³ And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.⁴ I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do.⁵ So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. (John 17:1-5)

And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. This is how Jesus begins the prayer for us...that we may know God. And once again a little later in the prayer Jesus prays, "I have made your name known."

Jesus makes God known to us in the love and the grace he has revealed to us and has given and shared with us. At the very heart of our identity as a Christian, or as a faith community is a relationship, a relationship that is love and grace shared and experienced with one another within the community and with those outside of the community...our neighbors.

This love and grace and our relationships established through that grace and love does NOT isolate us or keep us safe, holy, and clean, nor does it save us from the world...rather it sends us into it, to be the grace and love for those in the world. These relationships when established in love and grace are the same as the relationship shared by God with the Son and the Holy Spirit. Our identity as people of faith is revealed through our relationships and through the community we establish. Our identity is also revealed through our dependence on one another and their dependence on me and you, who are part of this community. And when those relationships are established, we increase God's glory.

St. Paul makes this known to the Church in Corinth in his Second Letter to them, when he writes:
Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. (2 Corinthians 4:15)

Once again from this prayer, we hear Jesus praying to God, that *they*, and us, you and me, may know God, the only true God, and Jesus Christ who God has sent. Is there any doubt in this prayer that there is life, there is hope, there is grace upon grace and there is salvation in knowing the true God. And we make this true God known in the love and grace we share with the world...and the relationships we establish out there in the world.

Within our confession of the Triune God in the words of the creeds we proclaim the relationship of these three natures of God. In the words of our confession of the creeds, we see no dividing line...no isolation...between the three natures of God. God is inseparable in that each nature of God proceeds from the next, they are *coequal, coeternal, and consubstantial* divine persons, in eternal relationship with one another.

This relationship is NOT intended, under any semblance of distinction to convey a difference between the three natures of the true Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit they are to show us the importance and the significance of relationship in our own faith and in the relationship we share with one another in this church and beyond.¹

¹ Joel C. Elowsky, Editor, Thomas C. Oden, General Editor. *Ancient Christian Commentary of Scripture, New Testament IVb, John 11-21*. Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2007. Section, 17:1-5, Jesus' Prayer for Himself: Humble Glory, from Hilary of Poitiers, "Hope of Life

The church is, for better or worse, the primary form of the risen Christ. The church is the form that makes Jesus Christ known in the world, with all its ills. The church is God's relationship that is established through the grace and love given to our neighbors and established in our communities.

While this is at times a pain to those of us in the church, nonetheless we are the institutional embodiment of Jesus Christ, we are for those in the world the grace upon grace we are given, we are the means of grace for the whole world and we are the relationship God has with the world despite its isolation, its individuality, its greed, its hatred, and its fear.

Jesus knows full well that the future of the faith community or the church is not going to be solely sustained by our human relationships. In this prayer before us today in this Gospel lesson, Jesus is not praying for gimmicks, fads, or far-fetched demands... we simply hear in this prayer that the one who stepped into the humanness of this world and makes God known for us and establishes a relationship with us now prays that we as the Body of Christ are God's love and grace that establishes a relationship with the world. Furthermore, in this prayer, Jesus emphasizes the community's share of the intimacy, mutuality, and the love revealed in the Relationship of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. But most of all...Jesus' prayer for each of us...is a prayer that brings us all face to face with the sovereign grace of God that sanctifies each one of us who knows His name...God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit... *Amen.*