



Sermon

The Last Request

John 17:1-11

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The last words of a dying person are important. From many examples both good and bad we can see the truth of this. Hitler wrote a letter to the German people blaming them for the failure of his campaign of world domination. In Contrast Ravi Zacharias tells of his father-in- Law unable to talk, turning to his wife and mouthing the words, "I love you." And then looking up to declare, "It is so wonderful." And then dying.

In the Gospel reading we get something similar but more telling than either of those. Jesus is about to go on the final journey which will lead to the Cross. John tells us nothing of the Garden of Gethsemane other than that Jesus and His disciples went there often and Jesus was arrested there. This happens immediately after the prayer which we have had read to us this morning.

The stunning thing I discovered is that John records the prayer in such a way that we are invited into this most intimate and personal moment in Our Lord's life. We are privileged to join in with Him as He prays.

Most of the recorded prayers of Jesus are short sentences (apart from the Lord's prayer). This one differs dramatically by being a whole chapter in length and one of the longer chapters in John's Gospel.

So, it is the LAST prayer and it is the LONGEST prayer recorded. And we are privileged to be present as Jesus prays.

The prayer has four sections:

1. Jesus prays for Himself. (verses 1-5)

2. Jesus prays for the disciples who are with Him.

(Verses 6- 20)

3. He prays for YOU and for all of us who by His grace have come to see that He is Lord of all. (verses 20- 24)

4. There is then a short closing section. (Verses 25-26)

We will only have time to deal with first section this morning.

John begins by saying, "After Jesus had spoken these words...." What words? All that He has been saying to the disciples in the last three chapters as He prepares them for what is about to happen. Remember, they were not expecting the Messiah to die. But notice His last words in Chapter 16: 33, "I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; **I have overcome the world!**"

With that victorious cry ringing in their ears, Jesus turns to prayer!

He begins by saying that the “hour has come”. Throughout John’s Gospel we often hear that Jesus hour has not yet come. Now from chapter 12: 23 onwards we are told that His hour has now come. The climax of all that Jesus came to do was at hand.

The Cross is clearly in Our Lord’s mind. When responding to the Greeks who came to see Him Jesus speaks of a grain of wheat dying that it may bear fruit. (John 12: 23ff) When Judas went out to betray Him Jesus says that the Son of Man is glorified. (John 31:31) On this third occasion Jesus asks to be glorified by the Father so that He may glorify the Father. Once again, the Cross is in mind for through it, we see the depth of the Father’s love for His creatures and the lengths to which Jesus willingly and freely went to demonstrate the glory of God which is self-sacrificial love for those who least deserve it.

St Paul tells us in Romans 5 that WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS Christ died for us. Not when we had it all together. Not when we were being everything that God wanted us to be. Rather, while we were still in rebellion against God, Jesus died for us. That is the extent of the love of God. That is the depth of the Father’s love for us and it is glorious! In the Cross God is glorified.

But for the disciples it will not appear glorious. They will face the depth of despair. Peter will betray Him. The others will run away. They will witness the horror of the Cross and watch all their hopes crushed under the weight of that unforgiving slab of wood. Worst of all His Mother will find the prophecy given at His birth fulfilled; a sword will pierce your soul too. (Luke 2:35.)

Let us never forget the cost of our salvation. It was not paid by us. We are living in that great victory and over the weeks leading up to Easter and particularly the last week we have been invited once again to ponder the immense cost that the Father bore as He watched His Son die for the sake of a world that ignored Him and ignores Him still. It is no wonder that we lift our hearts in gratitude and praise for the great gift we have been freely given at such great cost to God the Holy Trinity. It is because of this that great praise and worship are given to such a wondrous being.

But there is more. Jesus goes on to say that He has brought glory to the Father by completing the work the Father has given Him to do. His assignment is complete to this point and now the final steep ascent to Calvary begins. Once that is over, He will return to the Father and the glory they both enjoyed and enjoy from all eternity.

Jesus’ prayer will be answered.

Last Thursday we celebrated the Ascension. It is the only major feast that is celebrated on a weekday and so does not always get the attention it deserves. So, let us think about it for a moment. Through the Cross the great sacrifice has been given, the great example has been demonstrated, the great victory has been won. Jesus has been telling His disciples the meaning of all that they and He have experienced. He closes by telling them to “wait for the promise of the Father.” (Acts 1:4), which is the coming of the Holy Spirit. Now all is complete. There is nothing else to be done and the prayer we have been privileged to hear is answered. Jesus returns to the glory that He has lived in from all eternity.

But there is a difference! For now, the Son returns to the Father *with His humanity*. Humankind has been taken up into the God head. We will always have a representative right at the very heart of eternal reality. Never again can we treat humanity as a zero. Never again will we think of human beings as unimportant. Every one of us has the potential to be like Jesus in character or, horror of horrors, a being so awful our worst nightmares give only a pale image. As C. S. Lewis says in his sermon “The Weight of Glory” the holiest thing you come across in this world apart from the Sacrament is the people you meet every day.”

G A Studdert Kennedy wrote a poem about a dream a soldier had. He dreams of a time when he was on leave. Here is how he puts it as he looks into the eyes of Jesus;

“All eyes was in His eyes, all eyes,
My wife’s and a million more
And once I thought as those two eyes was the eyes of a London whore.
And they was sad—my Gawd how sad,
Wiv tears that seemed to shine,

And quivering bright with the speech of light
They said, her soul was mine.”

That is what the Ascension means. In Jesus humanity has been taken up into the Godhead in Jesus. Every person in this world has the potential to join in the Life of God. Life as Jesus describes it as, “life in all its fullness.” (John 10:10)

That is why Jesus says in His prayer that He came to give us all eternal life. (Verse 2) But please understand that this is not simply endless life as we know it. What is being referred to is not LENGTH of life but QUALITY of life. The same quality of life that the Holy Trinity enjoy. That is why the definition of this life is “to know the Father and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

This is the meaning of the Ascension. This is why we worship a God who stooped so low to lift us so high. This is the God who once again comes to us now and invites us into His Life whether we have known Him long or have yet to begin that relationship. The door is open. The invitation has been made.

Our Lord’s last request has been granted.

He has been glorified.

He wants you to be glorified with Him.

What is your response to the Crucified Risen Ascended Glorified Lord?