

## The Seventh Sunday of Easter

John 17:11b-19

Once again we look into the mystery. We do that every year on the last Easter Sunday, as we hear of how the Son of God spoke to the Father on that bitter last night in which He was to be given over to suffering and death for the salvation of sinners. As we listen in on the conversation, although we hear only one side of it, much like when somebody in the other end of the restaurant is on his mobile phone, except that in this case it is actually a *good* thing to hear at least part of a conversation in which we are not involved, we are made to gaze into what happens between the Father and the Son, how they relate to each other, and how we are, actually involved in the conversation, and very much so, as it is all about us, all about *you*, all about our salvation, and yours.

Actually, the mystery into which we gaze today is what we always have before us when we gather for worship, for the true worship of God is always the worship and the Word of His salvation, that our Lord Jesus is the Son of God, and Himself God from eternity, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit in glory, and in being God, who for our salvation had Himself made to be flesh, and born into our kind, to suffer and die for our salvation. For our salvation He had Himself baptised into us, and into our sin, to make Himself one with us, and with our sin, to suffer for it for us, in our stead and on our behalf, and die with it, and have it die with Him, so that it is no more, and can no longer condemn us before His judgement, we are right with Him and shall not suffer for ever in His wrath but rather live and be with Him in His love, baptised into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit as we are, that is: into the *reality* of God, that love which is and was for ever between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is what His faithful Church worships always, all year long.

It is God Himself having had Himself made Man we celebrate at Christmas, the eternal Word of God having become flesh for our salvation, and therefore is it that it would make so little sense for Christians *not* to celebrate His festive meal of salvation for Christmas, and not have His flesh and blood given to us, and His salvation with it. And that He is the Son of God and God Himself is confirmed to us a few weeks later when we celebrate that He was baptised along with sinners, as it had to happen to *fulfil all righteousness*, as He said it. For at His Baptism a voice from Heaven declared that *this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased*.

And this, in turn, is confirmed to us when, after having commemorated His sufferings and death, we are reminded how God the Father declared His sufferings to be indeed the sufferings of His Son, and again declared the Son to be pleasing to Him, and His sufferings sufficient for the salvation of sinners, by raising Him from death. Did we forget that? Christ is arisen. He is arisen indeed. Alleluia. He who suffered the fullness of death for us now lives, for with His sufferings all righteousness has been fulfilled, the righteous judgement of God executed upon the sin of all sinners, the price and penalty paid in full and in abundance, all evil and ungodliness and impurity dealt with and done away with that is in our hearts and minds, and in our lives, and we are right with God and righteous before His judgement.

This we must never forget, and His faithful Church never does; therefore is it that this great mystery is what His faithful Church always holds before His Christians, that we may never forget: that God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are one, and one God, and so God Himself has suffered for us, and saved us, and saves us still. And it is what His faithful Church always worships, whenever she does that. If we as His Church or His Christians were to move on to something else, we would no longer be His faithful Church, or His faithful Christians; ultimately, we would not be His Church at all, nor His Christians. As He has had His holy Apostle John write it: *Whoever moves on ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God; whoever abides in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son.*

Although this is always what we have before us in our worship: that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are one God, united in love from eternity, and that His love is not only *revealed*, but actually *realised*, in the salvation of sinners, we do gaze into the mystery of who God is, today, in a more direct manner than usually; again, as we hear what we hear today, we listen in on the conversation God has with Himself, or with each other, if you will.

We hear the Son pleading with the Father for the salvation of those whom He calls His own: *Holy Father, keep them in Your name, those whom You have given me, that they may be one as we are one.* And this is our salvation, for us to be one with all the faithful in the Father and the Son by being one with the Father and the Son, baptised into the Son as we are, who had Himself baptised into us, and who is Himself one with the Father from eternity.

And again, that that of which the Son speaks to the Father is our salvation should come as no surprise to us; we should know by now that our salvation is what is innermost in the heart of God.

With what we hear today, though, yet another mystery is made manifest to us: the Son pleads with the Father for the salvation of those whom the Father has given to the Son *already*, whom He has already made to be our Saviour. So that for which our Lord Jesus pleads is, in fact, already done, and a done deal.

In many ways it is that way with prayer. As you might remember, our Lord Jesus rebukes it is a *heathen* idea that prayer is an effort to win God over: *They think that they will be heard on account their many words.* Many Christians think along those lines, though, as if prayer were an effort to earn favour with God to make Him willing to give us what we want from Him, or otherwise manipulate Him, or even master Him. *Do not be like them, says our Lord Jesus, for your Father knows the things you need before you ask Him.* God has already won Himself over, and He is already determined to do what is good for us, and He already knows what that is. *He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, as He has had His holy Apostle Paul write it, how will He not also graciously give us all things with Him?* Nevertheless, He has also had the same Apostle admonish Christians to *in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.* Although all our requests are all known to God already, and what is good for us, and what He will give to us, still He wants us to talk with Him about what is in our hearts and minds, for that is what it means to *relate* to someone; as also the Son pleads with the Father for that which has been resolved from eternity between the two who are one, and which the Son is fully capable of working Himself, and *does*, that those whom the Father has given to Him be kept in the faith: *Those whom You gave me I have kept, as we also hear it today that He said it, and no one of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.*

For those whom the Father has given to the Son the Son pleads with the Father that the Father will keep them in His name; and He Himself keeps them in His name so that none is lost. Well, one *was* lost, Judas, and somehow this had to be, *that the Scripture might be fulfilled.* Still, Holy Scripture relates that our Lord Jesus spoke kindly to Judas and called him to repent, not so as not to be betrayed, for that had to be, but rather that Judas might later return to the faith so as *not* to be lost.

For as Holy Scripture teaches throughout, God wills for no sinner to suffer for ever in His Wrath.

There are things Holy Scripture does not make quite clear to us; like exactly how things work with on the one hand what God has determined from eternity, what *must* happen, what *might* happen, what *God wills* to happen, and what He only *knows* will happen, and on the other hand exactly what part our own choices and decisions play, in this life as well as with regards to our eternal fate and future. What Holy Scripture does make clear, though, is that ultimately God will make all things well; although, no doubt, some things will be well in ways we do not know and could never, as of yet, comprehend.

*I have given them Your Word, we also hear the Son saying to the Father, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I am not praying that You would take them out of the world, but that You would keep them from the evil one.* So He pleaded before the Father, who still pleads before the Father as our heavenly High Priest, for those whom the Father has given to Him. Nevertheless, again, He has also taught His Christians to pray ourselves to the Father: *Deliver us from evil!*; or, actually, as it is in the New Testament Greek: *deliver us from the evil one.*

Now, the prayer itself is obviously meaningful, that we who are still stuck in this world, although we belong to His Kingdom, not turn to the things of the world and fall again under the power of the devil. Still, there it is again: He who has already delivered us from the power of devil pleads with the Father to keep us from the devil, and teaches us, also, to make the same plea to the Father, although He Himself keeps us in His name; again, prayer is as much about *relating to God* as it is about making Him to make things to happen.

Similarly He pleads with the Father: *Sanctify them by Your Truth; Your Word is Truth. As You sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.* With His Word are they *sanctified*, whom the Father has given to Him, that is: we are made *holy*. In His Word of salvation, which He has His Church speak in the world, He claims sinners as His own, and He makes us to be that. And in His Word of life is His own life, and as He makes His own life to live in us, He preserves us for the joy of His Kingdom. As we also hear it that He said it: *These things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.*

Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing. *Amen.*