



Sunday Reflection

Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 29 May 2022

Easter 7

Reflection for this week's Gospel teaching

"...that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." John 17.21

Setting the scene

As we look at our own Christian life and church today it is easy to feel that we are facing unique challenges. We look with longing at a time when entire families and households came to Christ and had only to hear the Gospel to believe. We forget how it must have been for those early Christians and how much effort Paul and the early church put in to teaching the early followers about the faith and about Christ Jesus and praying for each other.

The events in the Roman colony of Philippi were happening about a decade and a half after Jesus spoke his parting words to his disciples that John recounts in his Gospel. In the intervening time Jesus has ascended to glory as he foretold and the Holy Spirit, as he promised, has

come to empower his disciples and those who believe on his name, to be his witnesses.

Even in the dead of night in prison, the prayers of Paul and Silas were heard. From their innermost cell their voices carried to the other prisoners who listened to them praying aloud and singing. How did it affect them? Was it only Paul and Silas who did not run away when their chains fell off?

I'm reminded of what happened during lockdown when many people who don't or no longer go to church tuned into online broadcasts of services. They heard the prayers and the singing and maybe even joined in. What work did the Holy Spirit do amongst them and what can we do to assist her marvellous power?

That's why the *Thy Kingdom Come* prayer movement is so exciting. This global wave of prayer extending from Ascension to Pentecost involves people from over 80 Christian denominations in 120 countries. We have so much to learn. These days it is African Christians who come to Europe to evangelise us and often what they notice is our lack of confidence. One such priest who came to Ayrshire from Malawi said to me that he can't understand why we keep complaining about the lack of children and young people in our churches. What would I do, he asked me, if one of my grandchildren went missing? Go and look for them I said. Your children are missing he said, go and find them. His words hit home.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

In John's account Jesus' final words before his arrest are prayers on behalf of his future followers. We can, as it were, eavesdrop on him praying to the Father for us. "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word." (v.20) Jesus isn't at all shy about asking his Father to accomplish God's own

will. He knows that even with the gift of grace and the Spirit, people need to be prayed for if they are to live out God's dream for the world.

Moreover, there is no inevitability about the outcome. Even Jesus needs to pray for God's will to be done and God's Kingdom to come. We can hear Jesus' own trust in the Father's love and his longing for it to be known and shared and surely this contributes to the power of his prayer: "Father, *I desire* that those also whom you have given me, may be with me where I am to see my glory..." (v 24a). It is not only through the Lord's Prayer that Jesus teaches us how to pray.

Many centuries later St Ignatius of Loyola was to develop an entire spiritual practice, known to us now as Ignatian Spirituality. You may know it from daily reflections such as on the Sacred Space site put out by the Irish Jesuits. Ignatius builds on this longing for God's will to be done, working from our desires, not starting from our fears. Those who experience the Ignatian Exercises as they are called are drawn further into the love of God and are moved to respond freely to the gift of God's love to them, 'drawn, not driven' is the shorthand for this way of praying, so that we become shaped by love to do God's will for us and the world. It is a way of self-sacrifice and total commitment, as modelled by St Paul.

In a few, dense verses, Jesus sets out a promise and a challenge. Jesus promises that he will make God's name known so that God's love may be in those who believe. And the challenge is that he longs that those who believe may be one with each other, with God and with Jesus himself. And this he suggests is the precondition for bringing others to faith. Here's a reminder of part of his prayer: "I in them and you in me, that they may be completely one, *so that the world may know that you have sent me...*" (v. 23a).

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

One sign of confidence in our faith is prayer.

Through *Thy Kingdom Come* people can become aware that Christians are praying for them and for the world. A couple of the videos made for TKC show the power of doing as Jesus did and praying for others. In one a daughter takes us to see her late father's shed where he kept his prayer journal. Every time he came across someone, he wrote their name in it and he prayed for them consistently and for a long time. Other people speak of the years in which they have held others in prayer. In an interview, some young people they are asked if they have ever been prayed for and what it meant. Yes, says one, I felt blessed and another, No, but I think I would like it.

TKC asks us to 'pray for 5', 5 people known to us who do not yet know the love of the Lord. And if this makes you squeamish, then pray for 5 things that are dear to your heart that you want God to bring about in the world. It may be peace or some other just cause. Pray for them every day for these 10 days. Keep them in your heart or stick a reminder on the fridge. And let's see what the Holy Spirit can do. But remember, it will be in her own good time.

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Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God's spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst some folk are not able to meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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