

The Seventh Sunday of Easter
May 7-8, 2016
John 17:20-26

“Praying for You”

On the church’s calendar, today is the Seventh Sunday of Easter, but on everyone’s mind is the fact that today is Mother’s Day. When I was looking for a Mothers Day card this past week, I came across this one (show card). On the front of the card at the top, it says: “Things you ask Mom,” such as “What’s for dinner?” “What time is it?” “Why not?” “How come?” “When is it my turn?” “Can I have more?” “Where is it?” “Will you read this to me?” “Can I watch TV?” “Do I have to go to bed?” And at the bottom of the front of the card, it says, “Stuff you ask Dad:” “Where’s Mom?” So true! This is a day set aside on our national calendar to remember, honor, and give thanks for our mothers – those who are living and those who have gone before us in the faith. My own mom will be 94 in December and she now makes her home at the Heartland Care Center in my little hometown of Marcus, Iowa. This was a move she willingly made earlier this year, and she is thriving in her new home. She enjoys the many different activities going on but is especially partial to balloon volleyball, riding the exercise bike, and going outside on the patio to sit in the sun. She also enjoys reading and working on word puzzles, as well as having family members come to visit – something I will be doing next month when I go out to officiate at a niece’s wedding. My siblings tell me that mom enjoys having people come to visit, but don’t plan to stay too long because mom has things to do and activities lined up. So when she’s ready for you to leave, she’ll get up and start walking you to the front door while telling you that it was so nice of you to come to see her. My mom is a person of great faith. One of the things she frequently says is that she prays for all of us every day, and I know that she does. That is something mothers often do especially well: praying for their family members frequently and fervently. In today’s Gospel lesson, the Lord Jesus himself prays for his followers – for you and me. This becomes the theme for the message today, “Praying for You.” May the Lord’s rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus’ sake.

“Praying for you” – sometimes we will say that to others. We may also write it in notes we email or send to people in our lives. But we are easily distracted by circumstances in life. We get overtaken by events, despite our best intentions. We may forget to pray for those whom we’ve said we’ll pray for. Has that ever happened to you? I confess that it’s happened to me. But Jesus does not forget to pray, and that is what he is doing here in today’s Gospel lesson. John 17 is called Jesus’ “High Priestly Prayer,” and it is unique to John’s Gospel. We hear only a portion of it today, so I encourage you to go home and read all of John 17. Hear from Jesus himself how he prays for you. You might think, “But Jesus lived 2000 years ago. How can he pray for me today?” Note the first verse in today’s Gospel lesson: **“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word...”** “Those who will believe in me through their word” – that’s us! We are those who by the power of the Holy Spirit have believed in the word of truth about Jesus, true God and true Man, that has come down to us from those first apostles. Jesus’ prayer continues as he prays not once, not twice, but three times that his followers **“may all be one”** (John 17:21, 22, 23), just as Jesus himself and the Father, along with the Holy Spirit, are one in being, will and love. It is this sacred unity among his followers that Jesus prays for. The unity of Christ’s people, his Church, is not some organizational, structural, outward sort of thing. Rather, the true unity of the Church is rooted in the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments, apart from any human traditions (Augsburg Confession VII, “Of the Church”). What unites us is the confession of who Jesus is and how he comes to us in Word and Sacrament with his gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. This is what makes all believers in Christ one, in spite of external boundaries and divisions.

“Praying for you” – this is what our crucified, risen, and ascended Savior continues to do for us. This past Thursday, we celebrated Jesus’ ascension into heaven. Forty days after he rose from the dead, Jesus ascended to the Father where he is now seated in power and glory, and from which he will come again to

judge the world in righteousness. Ascension Day is one of the forgotten festivals of the church year, but it still remains vitally important because there at the Father's right hand Jesus lives to make intercession for his people (Hebrews 7:25). He is, even now, praying for us! Isn't that amazing to consider? The Savior who died and rose again for us, who is "**the root and descendent of David, the bright morning star**" (Revelation 22:16), continues to pray and intercede in our behalf to his Father and our Father. This is what one of the stanzas from that beloved Easter hymn, "I Know That My Redeemer Lives," tells us. We sang it yesterday at the funeral for our brother in Christ, John Long, and we sing it today as our opening and closing hymn in worship:

*He lives to bless me with his love;
He lives to plead for me above;
He lives my hungry soul to feed;
He lives to help in time of need.
(Lutheran Service Book 461, stanza 3)*

Jesus is indeed praying for you and for me, and for all of his children scattered throughout the world. Jesus is praying that we may all be one in him, as we are told that those first disciples were: "**All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers**" (Acts 1:14). Jesus is praying that we abide in faith unto the end – until he comes or takes us home. Jesus is praying that whatever our differences may be – race, language, culture, age, gender, socio-economic status – that we may be one in him who loves us and gave himself for us, that the words of today's psalm may be said even of us today: "**Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers [and sisters] dwell in unity!**" (Psalm 133:1).

And so even as the Lord Jesus prays for us, we ourselves pray those words from the final book of Scripture heard in today's Epistle lesson: "**Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!**" (Revelation 22:20). Amen.