

The Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year A, 2008

The Rev. Ronald N. Johnson

This is the last Sunday of the Easter season, the Sunday that follows the Ascension. Our Lord's Ascension marks the beginning of a new era for humanity, for with the Ascension, Jesus is no longer bodily present among us, and we now live in the era of the Christ of faith. Next Sunday we will celebrate the Feast of Pentecost in which we acclaim the coming of the Holy Spirit into the church. The Holy Spirit empowers us to live in faith and know the Christ of faith. It is God's perfect way of bringing completion to those who love and serve him in the name of Jesus.

Today's Gospel reading is strangely out of place from a chronological perspective because it takes place not after the Ascension, nor even after Easter – chronologically it occurred before the Crucifixion. The text is a prayer that Jesus prayed to the Father. Jesus prayed, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. . . . And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one."

This prayer comes from intense anticipation of his coming death and resurrection, anticipation so great, so strong that in his mind, in that prayer, it already is. It is a prayer of gratitude, of confidence and of faith in the perfect infinite love between God the Father and God the Son. The prayer helped Jesus prepare himself for what would come on Good Friday. The prayer helps us live with confidence in the certainty of our eternal life with God.

The prayer reflects an unending union between what theologians the Godhead, the Trinity, because the union includes the Holy Spirit, co-eternal, co-equal – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What we must grasp is that the perfect, infinite love of that union draws us like a magnet to participate and remain in that perfect love. "This is eternal life," Jesus said, "that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

We feel that union and celebrate that union every time we pray, every time we meditate about God and our relationship with the Trinity and especially when we gather in Christian community to celebrate the Holy Eucharist. In these moments, we ought to be able to feel ourselves in the presence of God. With hope and confidence, we are assured that we will dwell with God eternally. We are one with the Spirit, we are one with the Lord and through Christ Jesus, we are one with God the Father. Jesus said, in this prayer to his Father, "All mine are yours and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them." We, too, are glorified when our faith puts us in the arms of the Risen Savior and in that glory we live forever in the presence of God. *Amen.*

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