

Gospel of John - episode 36

Chapter 17 part 3

Welcome to our sharing on Chapter 17 of St. John's Gospel which deals with the Priestly Prayer of Christ. I want to pick up in 17:13 where Jesus says to the Father - because the whole prayer is addressed to the Father - "but now I am coming to you. I am saying these things to share my joy with them to the full". Jesus wants to share all his privileges, joy and happiness with the disciples. He wants them to have everything that he had. Here you can see the revelation that he made in chapter 15:9, "as the Father has loved me, so I love you". The Father gave everything to his Son. The Son now gives everything to his beloved disciples. What John wants to emphasise is the **knowledge of the 'I am', the true God,** and living in unity and love, which is the Trinitarian life on earth, plus the indwelling of the Trinity in each one. This would ensure that we would have joy, even in the midst of trouble.

This interior joy was to be the strength of the community. Nehemiah 8:10 said that, "the joy of the Lord is my strength". In Matthew 5:11-12 Jesus said that even in the midst of persecution you will have this joy, because it is interior. We've spoken about this before; it has nothing to do with external circumstances. Jesus says, "happy are you when people abuse you, persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you on my account." So, if you're persecuted because of what you've done, that's different, but if the persecution is because of Jesus, he said, "rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven". This is the way they persecuted the prophets before you". So, if we're persecuted for Jesus' sake, he said, 'rejoice!'

You won't enjoy the suffering, but interiorly, you have the joy of knowing your identification with Christ and your reward, both. Saint Paul, in speaking to the Thessalonians 1:1-6 a long time later, said the same thing. It was with the joy of the Holy Spirit that you took the Gospel in spite of great opposition. No matter who was against you, you still had this interior joy inside of you. The gifts that Jesus is praying for right now were experienced in abundance by the early church. So, 17:13 ends with, "I want my joy to be with them to the full".

Then in 17:14, Jesus says, "I passed your Word onto them, and the world hated them because they belong to the world no more than I belong to the world". Here John repeats something that has been said eloquently in the final discourse, that the reason why the unbelieving world would persecute Christians is that we are completely different to them, so different in fact, that there isn't even a language in common. We don't think the same; we don't act the same; we don't speak the same; we have a completely different lifestyle. Our lifestyle is to witness to them as to what they're called to be, even if they reject it. This abrasive relationship between the church and the world proves that the church is in the right place, that she is a light in the darkness, leaven in the dough.



In 17:15, Jesus prays “I’m not asking you to remove them from the world, but to protect them from the evil one”. If Jesus asked that his disciples be removed from the world, they would have no testimony, and no one to testify to. We would have no mission, nor could we continue his mission. He came in the midst of all the chaos and disaster of the unbelieving world. It was in that situation that he carried out his ministry. That is what he is doing with his church also, sending her out into the chaos and darkness of the world to give her witness. So, if we’re looking for a comfortable position in which to proclaim the message of Christ, it won’t be there as long as the unbelieving world is around us. Jesus says in 17:16, “they do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. I want you to consecrate them in the truth”. Here we come to a very important point in the prayer before he prays for the unity of the church because there’s no point in us being unified in a compromised or worldly way. We have to be unified in a very important way.

Jesus prayed: “just as you have sent me into the world, I’m sending them into the world”. He who was presented to us in the first half of the Gospel as ‘the sent one’, is now the sender. When he was sent by the Father, he was the bearer of the Divine Name and the divine word as we’ve already said. It is now the duty of the beloved disciples to take that Divine Name and that divine word which has been given to them, and share it with others. But for this to happen safely, Jesus has to bring them to the point of being consecrated to God. So, he says in 17:16, “I want you to consecrate them in the truth”. “They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. Consecrate them in the truth. Your Word is Truth”. Now, to consecrate means to set aside, to dedicate oneself to God. In other words, to sanctify oneself.

Therefore, Jesus wants these men as his priests because that is the position of priest, a consecrated, anointed person. So, the beloved disciples who are to be the bearers of the Divine Name and of God’s Word to the world must be set apart as special people with a special relationship with God and with God’s people. We know from the Old Testament that the priests, prophets and kings had a special relationship with the people of God, had to be consecrated as God servants so that they would carry out the prescriptions of the covenant. Therefore, the disciples must be consecrated in the truth, which is the Word of God... ‘consecrate them in your word’. Now, to be consecrated to the truth means that we stay completely with God’s revelation. We do not go aside to give our own ideas, whatever that would be. We don’t teach ourselves. We don’t teach ordinary human wisdom. You can get that from the world. No, what the church teaches is what God has revealed about Himself and about us.

To stay faithful to that Word the Lord wants them consecrated to it. Therefore, holiness will be demanded from the beloved disciples in every generation, because they have joined the royal



line of the bearers of God's Word who were the prophets of the Old Testament. If you study the prophets you will see that they had to be prepared for their public mission. The Apostles are also called to a public mission vis-a-vis the world, and for that, Jesus said that he would consecrate himself for this purpose. That means that 'I will offer myself as a victim in sacrifice to make sure that these men can accomplish this'. I don't think the Apostles at this particular point – also many of their successors in later times - are conscious of the fact that Jesus died to give them the authority, power and the grace to have an effective ministry in the world. If they would contemplate this message, they would realise that more and enter into it more deeply.

Now, everything that Jesus is asking for will be given after he is lifted up on the cross and then lifted up in glory. But in this particular case, **it's the lifting up in the Ascension**, the final lifting up of Jesus from the earth, when the mantle of his mission will fall on the Apostles - and there will be 12 at that stage because Matthias will have joined them. The mantle of his priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission will fall on them just as the mantle of Elijah fell on Elisha **only as Elijah was being taken up into heaven**. If you go back to 2 Kings you will find that this is a prophetic forecast of what happens to Jesus and the twelve. When the priestly, prophetic, and kingly mantle of Jesus falls upon the twelve **they will have already received the power from on high at Pentecost**, therefore, they will be able to take this mission to the ends of the Earth.

So now we come to the final part of this wonderful prayer, and it is a prayer for unity. We begin at 17:20. "I pray not only for these, but for those also who through their words, will believe in me". That prayer is for every single person who will ever come to Christ, including you and me. "May they all be one Father, may they be one in us as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may I believe that it was you who sent me. I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are". What is this unity he talking about? **It is the unity of the three persons in the One Triune God**. They are a community of Persons having one will and one love, completely and totally given to each other eternally. That mystery of the '**Three In One**' is to be manifested in the church because each one of us will be experiencing this Trinitarian life. Each one of us will be a dwelling place for God. The Holy Spirit will be interiorly teaching, enlightening and guiding each person. Therefore, the mystery of the **diversity in unity** and **the unity in diversity that is in the Trinity** is to be manifested upon the Earth.

When the world sees that, the world will recognise **it is looking at the I am**. It is this mystery of God upon the earth that the unbelieving world needs to see. When the church doesn't give this testimony of the unity in diversity and the diversity in unity **the world is scandalised** and takes the excuse to continue in its sinful rebellion against God. Therefore, we, as the people of God have huge responsibility towards the unbelieving world. When this reality actually comes into its fullness on the earth - I'm not sure it is in its fullness now with over 30,000 sects of Christianity -



but when it does come fully and the unbelieving world still resists God and still will not bend the knee before Him, then when the cosmos stands before Jesus in final judgement, they will have no excuse because the testimony to God and to eternal love in every generation will have been given. This testimony is being given to whatever extent the church is capable of at this particular moment, but there will come a time when it will be given in its fullness.

We pray that the unbelieving world, right from the very beginning, will look in amazement at ordinary people living in union with God, and living in union with each other. I've already given you that piece from Tertullian, where the Romans said, 'look at these Christians, how they love one another'. They were utterly amazed how the martyrs took care of each other on their way out into the Coliseum. Felicity and Perpetua, for example, one of them a princess and the other her servant looked after each other like two sisters as they walked out to their death for Christ. This was a matter of total amazement for the pagans who observed them.

This testimony has been given from the beginning. As men and women try to live together in community - all down the centuries - that testimony is given continuously. What is the world looking at? It sees a community manifesting to the world that its origin is God himself, and that **this God is the Triune Love**. That is who He is. He is infinite love; inexpressible love. He is inexplicable love; uncreated, eternal, and incomprehensible love. What we call divine love is the source of this community, the source of the miracle of people living together in unity. So, the diversity in unity in the church is extremely important.

I want to read 17:22. "I have given them the glory that you gave to me, that they may be one as we are". That's **the Three in One**. "With me in them and you and me, may they be so completely one that the world will realise that it was you who sent me". So, the world must see this testimony, and "that the world will see that I have loved them in the same way as you loved me". Well, we were told that in chapter 15:9, "as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you". 'I've loved you **and every other individual also**. This incredible privilege of revealing who God really is and the truth about God, ourselves and about life, is the privilege that the church has in every generation.

The church must manifest the Presence of God, and His divine love residing in her so that the world may believe. This testimony continues on from generation to generation. Therefore, Jesus' statement in chapter 5:19 takes on a new meaning at this point. He was at the beginning of his public ministry when he said, "as the Father goes on working, so do I". We associate the Father with the work of creation and its preservation. Then the Son picks up the Father's work with the work of Redemption. Now, as Jesus goes back to the Father to send the Holy Spirit to reside in the church, she is able to say, **'Jesus goes on working and so do we'**! It's a mystery,



but a glorious one that only contemplation can make sense of. So, the unity in diversity that the Lord is looking for isn't just something that happens internally inside our own being. It is expressed also when the church does the works that Jesus has done.

Therefore, the Church will continue to take care of the poor, the sick, the blind, the lame, those in need, including the marginalised and homeless. These are all expressions of this divine love where God speaks to people through us, saying: 'you are my child, and you are precious in my eyes, and I love you'. If the unbelieving world could see - but unfortunately it is blind - they would discover that the origin of the church is God himself. If they came into our churches they would meet God himself in our tabernacles - if only they could see! They would realise that He is at the heart of it all, that **this Uncreated Love is coming to them** through ordinary people who have opened themselves up to this astonishing mystery. It is very important for us to contemplate this mystery because it's only there that the reality of what is being said can sink deeply into our being, so that we can participate to the greatest possible extent in what Jesus wants to do for the world.

Thank you for listening. Goodbye. God bless you.

INTERVAL

Welcome to our sharing on John's Gospel. I want to take up at 17:24-26: "Father I want those you have given to me to be with me where I am, so that they may always see the glory that you have given to me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Father, righteous one, the world has not known you, but I have known you, and these have known that you have sent me. I have made your name known to them, and will continue to make it known so that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and that I may be in them". This is the only time in this wonderful prayer where Jesus uses the words, 'I want'. This prayer has been completely utterly other, but now when Jesus wants something he addresses his Father as 'Abba'. Unfortunately, it is translated as 'Father' in the English language, which is a more formal address.

What Jesus wants is that **his disciples will always be with him!** This request reveals just how much he loved these men around the table at the last supper, and how it must have broken his heart to see Judas leave to go to his destination. Really sad. During this time, Jesus lifted the beloved disciples up to the realm of a love. He brought them to be born in the Spirit, which he revealed in Chapter 3:5. He taught them how to live in the realm of the spirit, the realm of above - the Kingdom of God. He has showed them how to live together, even though they had such



diverse ages, characters and backgrounds, because that reflected the future reality of the church. Jesus showed them how to live in loving communion, and in union with the Blessed Trinity. That's wonderful, but if it is only for now, it's not that wonderful. **What about forever?** What about the longest part of our lives, the shortest part of our existence is the little bit we live on the earth in our exile. The longest part of our existence is lived in God's presence in eternity.

So, what Jesus asks for is that **their final destiny would be secured**. This is the great privilege of the believer, and this is the absolute security of the believer, that the Lord has asked that their destiny would be secure. He is going to heaven to open it for them as we learned in chapter 14. He will open the door and there is a place for everyone; he makes sure that he has requested this himself. Now, since we know that Jesus is one with the Father, the Father is one with Jesus, they have one will; they are one love, so, what Jesus requests is actually **what the Father wants**. This is what we mean by God's Will. Jesus asks and expresses something on earth that the Father actually wants, so the eternal destiny and salvation of the believers is made secure. It's the most wonderful thing. What does he ask? I mean, he could say, 'save them and make sure they get into paradise'. He doesn't say that. He says, **"I want them to be with me so that they will always see the glory that you have given to me"**.

They will always see God. This is heaven. This is the Beatific vision. This is it. Philip had said in chapter 14, "Oh, show us the Father!". Jesus now makes absolutely sure Philip **will see the Father**. He addresses the Father at the beginning as **the Holy One**. That is the 'hallowed be your name' part of the Our Father. Now he addresses him as **the Righteous One** because in the events that are just about to happen, God the Father, will show both His Holiness and His Justice in all that happens. The disciples will learn in a very new way that **God is Holy; God is Just; God is Love, and God is Mercy. God is everything**. He isn't just love. His wisdom, justice, and mercy, are all expressions of this one love. We are inclined to think that his justice is merely punishment, but that is not so. It is part of restoring everything to the divine order so that there can be a final unity between heaven and earth. Unfortunately, the unbelieving world won't appreciate anything until it's too late. They will only understand at the final judgement. That's extremely sad.

Judas will not be the only one lost, other branches will be lost also, branches of the Vine! We have already seen that their blindness is culpable and deliberate. They chose to put themselves under the influence of the prince of darkness. **But the beloved disciples will see God**. They will see his glory. They will be present to the blessed Trinity forever. What they knew during their lifetime, in their own hearts, and tried to express in their relationships in the church, they will know in absolute fullness for ever. This is wonderful. Jesus finishes up by saying, "I have made **Your Name** known to them, and I will continue to do it". Jesus will continue working in the

church throughout history until the end of time. Just as the Father revealed himself on Mount Sinai and then came to live or tabernacle among his people as they journeyed to the promised land, so Jesus has revealed himself in his mission, and will tabernacle with us in the blessed Eucharist and in our hearts for all time also. So that brings us to the end of this Priestley prayer of Jesus.

We now go into the incredible mystery of the Passion of Jesus beginning with chapter 18. First I must give you an introduction because things are not what they seem. John, as you now know, doesn't deal with things in the same way as the Synoptic Gospels. He has his own unique approach to things. So, the first thing you would expect is that Jesus goes into the Garden of Gethsemane and has three hours of agony, which are described graphically by St. Luke. John doesn't deal with that. He deals with something that the other Gospels merely mention in passing. John picks it up as something astonishing, and we need to deal with it. John knows that you know about the agony in the garden. In fact, he knows that you know all the details of the Passion, so he doesn't have to repeat it. He wants to give us a new understanding.

As we move from chapter 17 into chapter 18, we have to take a deep breath because we're moving from the serenity, calm, beauty and love of the Cenacle, where Jesus shared his heart and his whole being with his beloved disciples, to go out into the darkness of the night - into the darkness of unbelief and violence in the cosmos. All the warnings that Jesus gave to them about how the darkness and violence of the cosmos will affect them is going to happen. They will get it within minutes. It comes as a shock because we have been in intimacy with the Father, and wrapped in the love of the Most Holy Trinity. We have absorbed their food, their word and their life. We have been there.

Then suddenly we're plunged into the frenzied activity of Jesus's enemies who are in a desperate rush to kill him before the Passover. It's actually hard to take, but I want to bring you back to bring you forward. Go back to the time of Moses when he spent 40 days on the mountain in communion with God, when God gave him the Ten Commandments. Communion with God transformed Moses to the point where he had to cover his face because the people couldn't take the glory of God shining on his face.

But when Moses descended the mountain - carrying with him the two tablets of stone which **expressed God's true will** for how they should live - he heard a frenzied sound coming from the people of God. There at the foot of the mountain they had built an altar to a false god and placed an idol on it. Then they indulged in the sexual immorality that was part of the idol worship. All this frenzied activity, all this sin, all this rebellion was done literally under God's nose! God was appearing on the mountain at the time! It affected Moses so badly that he threw



the two tablets at them. What was the point of revealing in God's will to a people in total rebellion against him. It is the shock of coming out of God's presence with the beauty, glory, grace and magnificence of God's presence straight into sin! The sheer ugliness of sin strikes you.

Well, that's the way it is for us now going from chapter 17 to 18. We had the wonderful unhurried atmosphere in the Cenacle, but once Jesus left, the tempo speeds up. Everybody's in a hurry. In less than 24 hours, there will be several trials for Jesus; there will be condemnation, followed by torture, and he will be dragged from one place to another. It's unbelievable. John wants you to feel the difference between communion with God and the noise of the world. He wants you to see that these are genuinely two different Kingdoms, two dimensions of being, which operate on different principles. It is a terrible shock, not just for the beloved disciples who are meeting this for the first time, but for us who have been in the Cenacle with Jesus and the Apostles.

By the time the final discourse is finished, we have probably forgotten all about Judas who left us in chapter 13:30. He went off to join the enemies in the Sanhedrin, to make it possible for them to capture Jesus. Now, why would it be difficult for them to do this? They had decided to arrest Jesus by night. They could easily have arrested him in the temple, but if they did, Jesus would have been defended by the people because so many believed in him, so, they wouldn't risk that. They decided to do deceitfully arrest him in secret, but they knew that he would be surrounded by eleven men, all of whom would be more or less dressed the same, and would be wrapped up in mantles because of the night, and they all would have beards, so, it would be very difficult to distinguish one from the other. **Only one who knew Jesus intimately could identify him.** That was Judas's function.

To grasp the events that we're moving into now, we must understand that Satan will take terrible revenge on Jesus **because Jesus came to restore humanity to God's original order.** In all the actions of Jesus, very particularly in his exorcisms, he was challenging Satan's rule which brings chaos into everyone's lives. There is an event that John doesn't deal with in his Gospel, but needs to be mentioned in passing, which are the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness, where Satan tried to find out if Jesus really was the Son of God. It's as if Satan said: 'I can't believe that you would be so humble, simple and ordinary; that you would be fasting! You could turn stones into bread, if you really are the person I think you are'.

So, from the very beginning, Satan couldn't take it on board that **God, the living God** whom he knew from the time of his creation, would present himself in such a humble guise to his creatures whom Satan despised and only wanted to destroy. So, the hatred and revenge of the dark angel is what we're dealing with. He uses the darkness, unbelief and sinfulness of the



Sanhedrin, Pilate, and the crowd for his own purposes. Now, I'm sure that if the Sanhedrin realised that Satan was using them they would have stopped. Pilate wouldn't have a clue. He was a complete pagan. In the supper room everything was light and love, but out in Jerusalem, in God's own city that night, Satan had taken over. All was darkness, hatred and chaos; it would soon be hell on earth for everyone.

We must confront the two powers that will clash: Light will be in contention with darkness. Love with hate, and life with death. The issue is, **who will rule the world?** Will it be darkness or light? If darkness, then hatred and chaos rules the world and will turn it into hell on earth for everyone. Jesus and Satan are the two powers that face each other down **because one of them will rule the earth**, not the two. One of them will rule. It is comforting for us to remember the prologue of John 1:5, at this point, where he said "that the darkness could not overpower the light". The light was the stronger of the two. All the events that we will consider in the Passion of Jesus, have to be seen not just on a physical level, but much more on the spiritual plane. One of the sadnesses in the church is that so many people merely look at the Passion of Jesus on the surface, just what happened to him physically.

They make no attempt to find out what is going on interiorly or **to discover the great struggle for planet earth!** That is the journey we will take in the next couple of chapters. It will be dramatic and wonderful, even though the events are terrible. When you see what's going on in the spiritual plane you will join the crowd in saying, '**Crucify him**', because it's the only way the world can be transformed. It's the only way we can be saved. It's the only way any of us will get to heaven. Even if we say, 'let him be crucified' with tears in our eyes, we still have to say it because he alone can save us. Nobody else can save us. So, this is going to be a spiritual journey. On the one hand, we will observe Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin desperately clinging to power, trying to hold on to their institutions, their old Jewish faith, and their national heritage, and in the process, they are prepared to kill a man in the name of God!

You saw that in chapter 11:49-50 Caiaphas, the high priest, was the one who said, "It's better for one man to die for the people", so, it is clear that he didn't mind getting rid of Jesus. These high priests succeeded in killing God Incarnate; in killing their Messiah, the King of the Jews. This is frightening. On the other hand, we have Pilate, who is a proper pagan who didn't know what truth was. He happens to be the governor of Palestine and the personal representative of Caesar, who heads the great superpower in the world at the time. He and his government are prepared to compromise and kill just for the sake of political advantage. These two powers that are operating in the cosmos, in the unbelieving world, are willing to manipulate and destroy each other also, so are easy prey for Satan and his minions to use against Jesus.



There are mighty powers contending with each other in this dreadful drama of the passion of Jesus. It isn't just Satan and Jesus, it's also the Roman Empire against the Jews, so we will see massive events take place, with Jesus present, **the innocent victim in the centre of it all**. I will continue this in our next episode.

Thank you for listening. Goodbye. God bless you.