

In the name of ✠ Jesus. Amen.

Jesus loves His Bride, the church. He cares for her; He prays for her. In this last Sunday of Eastertide, in our Gospel, we listen in on Jesus praying. It's called His high priestly prayer, and truth be told, what a wonderful text to consider as we celebrate an ordination.

Jesus' high priestly prayer has three parts to it, and it's divided up accordingly in the three-year cycle of our lectionary. In the first part, Jesus prays for Himself: "*Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you*" (John 17:1). Jesus glorifies the Father in obedience to His word. Indeed, for this purpose, Jesus came to this hour (John 12:27): to glorify the Father — to express the Father's love for the world as He is lifted up, that He might fall to the earth and die, that He might rise again in three days, that He might bear abundant fruit.

This is the work Jesus was sent to accomplish. And on the cusp of "*having accomplished the work*" the Father gave Him, He prayed again, "*now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed*" (John 17:4-5). That's what happened in the Ascension as we heard on Thursday. Jesus ascended into heaven, and was seated "*at [the Father's] right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named*" (Eph. 1:20-21).

In the second part, Jesus prays for His disciples whom He would later send out as His "*witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*" (Acts 1:8), whom He would send out to make "*disciples of all nations, baptizing them ... [and] teaching them ...*" (Matt. 28:19-20), whom He would send out to preach Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection, and repentance and the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name. Jesus would send them out, making them His Apostles; Jesus would send out a full complement of Apostles, calling Matthias into service to replace Judas, and numbering him with the other eleven.

The Apostles were sent out with faith. They were sent out with the truth that they had received from Jesus and had come to believe and confess: Jesus is "*the Christ, the Son of the Living God*" (Matt. 16:16). Even so, they were sent out with all of their fleshly weaknesses. They were sent out into a world that hates them because of Christ. They were sent out to face a mighty enemy in the evil one.

They were sent out because Jesus loves His Bride, the church, and cares for her. And so, He prayed for these who would establish the "one, holy, Christian and Apostolic Church," that they would be kept in this faith and confession, that they might "be one" as God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one — "one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity" (LSB, Athanasian Creed, 4). Jesus prayed for those

upon whose preaching and teaching His church would be built: “*Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth*” (John 17:17).

And in praying for the Apostles, Justin, Jesus prays for you who follow in their footsteps, being ordained today into the Office of the Public Ministry. As we confess, “the office of the ministry proceeds from the general call of the apostles” (Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, 10). Jesus prays for you because you are being sent out with the same fleshly weaknesses, into a world that has not relented in its hatred of Jesus or of His church, to do battle against the evil one on behalf of the saints at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Danville, Kentucky.

You are being ordained today into an office with the same “content and power” as the Apostles had. You are also being sent out with the same bold faith and confession. You are being sent out not with your own wisdom or cleverness, but with the same foolish word of God that the Apostles preached — of Christ the Word of God, descended from on high into our flesh as our Savior, of Christ the Son of Man, serving wretched sinners by giving His life on the cross as the ransom price for them, of Christ the Victor, whom death could not hold, whose victory gives us also the hope of resurrection and life, of Christ mighty and ascended Lord, who serves His church still by Word and water and Supper.

Jesus prays for you, Justin, because He loves and cares for His church. And so He prays for His church also, that is, for those who will believe because of your word. And yet, as you just heard, it is not your word that you have been called to preach, but God’s word, spoken “*long ago, at many times and in many ways, ... by the prophets,*” “*spoken ... by His Son*” (Heb. 1:1-2), spoken by Evangelists and Apostles, summarized in Creed and Confession. Jesus prays that the church would be one in this confession of the Holy Trinity, in the confession of Christ and Him crucified, in the truth of the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ Jesus, delivered by this word purely taught and the Sacraments rightly administered.

And herein lies the church’s oneness. It’s not sameness, but oneness in the Gospel and Sacraments. Our brothers and sisters here from Our Savior might be thinking, “Oh! Our pastor is used to all this ceremony that we see here today! He’s going to try to change us so that we are the same as Zion in Fort Wayne.” No! He will not, for Jesus does not pray for sameness, but oneness, and rest assured our oneness is not found in ceremony! This is what we confess: “For the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree about the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies instituted by men, should be the same everywhere. As Paul

says, ‘One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all’ (Ephesians 4:5–6)” (AC VII, 2-4).

For this is what Justin will today vow before the Lord and His church, and the Lord will hear these vows, and He will watch over Justin as he performs these vows day after day. Justin will promise to “perform the duties of [his] office in accordance with [the church’s Creeds and our Lutheran] Confessions, and that all [his] preaching and teaching and [his] administration of the Sacraments will be in conformity with Holy Scripture and with these Confessions.” Justin will promise to teach “the chief articles of Christian doctrine”; he will promise to “forgive the sins of those who repent”; he will promise to “minister faithfully” with a “ministry centered in the Gospel”; he will promise to “admonish and encourage the people to a lively confidence in Christ and in holy living.” He will promise to set a good example for his people by his life, by his study, by his prayers.

Of course, all of this is only by God’s grace and with His help. But the point is that none of it has to do with rites or ceremonies. Our oneness is found in Christ Jesus, and in the unified voice that proclaims Him and His gifts. Our oneness is effected by being united by Holy Baptism into the one Body of Christ. Our oneness in the Gospel is expressed by joining together at this altar to receive Christ’s body and blood and with that, forgiveness of our sins, life, and salvation. The Lord bless us in this oneness.

Jesus prays today — for those who are sent to preach — like Justin, and for those who hear and believe according to that word — His church. To be sure, we are commanded to prayer, but Jesus’ prayer today can serve as an invitation for us to pray as well — you, Justin, for your flock, and the church, for Justin, for faithfulness and steadfastness and diligence and courage and love, and for the perfect oneness that comes from Christ being in us, and we in Christ.

God grant this for the sake of Christ and His church.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.