

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

On Thursday, the 40<sup>th</sup> day after Easter, we celebrated Jesus' ascension bodily into heaven. Seated at the Father's right hand, Jesus Christ the righteous takes up one of His roles as advocate and intercessor. He intercedes on our behalf, even as He did on the night of His betrayal when already, He said, "*I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world. ... Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.*" Yes, on that fateful night Jesus prayed for His Church, His disciples, and all of us.

Jesus prayed that we might be kept in the Father's name. Of course, you were brought into this name as you passed through the waters of Holy Baptism. But to be kept in this name is to abide in Jesus and His word, for to know Jesus is to know the Father (John 8:19), and to come to Jesus is to come to the Father (John 14:6). You were made a disciple by your Trinitarian baptism, but you remain a disciple by abiding in Jesus' word (John 8:31), by partaking of the fruit of this true Vine in the Holy Sacrament, and thereby abiding in Him. You are kept in the Father's name when you bear the fruit of God's love, abiding in it.

This is just as Jesus has taught us to pray... "Our Father ... Hallowed be Thy name." Here we acknowledge that God's name is holy in and of itself, "but we [also] pray in this petition that it may be kept holy among us also." And that means just what Jesus teaches and prays for here: that we seek out and abide in "the Word of God ... taught in its truth and purity," for "anyone who teaches ... contrary to God's Word profanes the name of God among us." And so as we pray this petition, we are praying, "Protect us from [false teaching], heavenly Father," and "*sanctify [us] in the truth; Your word is truth.*"

But God's name is kept holy also when "we, as the children of God, also lead holy lives according to [that pure word]," for living "contrary to God's Word [also] profanes the name of God among us." And so again, we are praying as we pray the "Our Father," protect us from false teaching and from unrighteous lives, and help us to abide in Your word and in Your love, dear Father in heaven! And the ascended Jesus, our intercessor, then hears these righteous prayers that echo His own. He presents them to the Father: Here are prayers asked in My name. And the Father grants them according to His promise.

Jesus prayed for His church. He prayed also that we be kept "*from the evil one,*" just as He taught us to pray in the prayer He gave us: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." You recall how Luther teaches us that in this petition we are asking God to "guard and keep us" against the mischief not only of the devil, "*the god of this world,*" (2 Cor. 4:4) but also of the world itself, and our own sinful nature. These enemies seek to "deceive us or mislead us into

false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice.” Indeed, these enemies are in such a close alliance that it is difficult to distinguish the source of the deceit.

How necessary are these prayers—Jesus’ and ours, for how easily today are sinners wooed away from the truth of God’s word to some man-made religion or even a self-made religion, like the “spiritual but not religious crowd.” Theirs is still a religion — but usually of one. Their sacraments are walking on a beach and watching the sunset. How daring is that? That crowd doesn’t want to be challenged by a Word that makes them uncomfortable. That crowd doesn’t want to wrestle with an idea that they didn’t make up themselves. That crowd doesn’t want to be denied any act of self-indulgence or be tested with a call to sacrifice for another.

And I don’t think prayer is on these folks’ lips much either, at least, not a prayer for unity, for oneness as Jesus prayed for us: “*that they may be one.*” Why pray for unity when you’re the only one in your religion? It’s you, your false god, beaches, and sunsets.

But Jesus prays for us in the Church, that is, for people who have been called out of darkness and into His marvelous light, for God’s people, for people who have received mercy in Christ Jesus. Jesus prays for our faithfulness to the truth, and for our love for one another, and for righteousness in the face of the temptations of the evil one, so that we might be one as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are One.

Talk about not something made up by oneself...the Holy Trinity? Challenging? Are you kiddig me? This mystery? I can’t understand it, let alone explain it. But I can confess this God! Incarnation? Cross? Resurrection? Ascension? Do you wrestle with God about such foolishness and weakness? Of course, you do as I do. And yet here we are confessing that in them is the wisdom of God and the power of God.

We are one in this confession because we were baptized making this confession. “I believe in God the Father Almighty, ... and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord ... I believe in the Holy Spirit.” And by this baptism, we were incorporated into the one body of Christ by the one Spirit, St. Paul says (1 Cor. 12:13). We are His. He is ours. As St. John says, as we believe the testimony concerning Him, we have the Son of God, Jesus—He is ours—and we have life. That’s why St. Paul says that when we are baptized into Christ, “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*” (Gal. 3:27-8).

And in this oneness, in another letter, St. Paul encourages us to maintain this oneness through love— “*with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the **unity** of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope*

*that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:2-6).*

There is a reality of oneness in the body of Christ. We are members of one body, “one, holy, Christian and apostolic church.” We confess it; it’s an article of faith. The Augsburg Confession teaches, “one holy Church is to remain forever.” One, really and truly, and yet it is not seen by our eyes. It is hidden from our view, for this oneness is a result of faith, birthed in Holy Baptism, sustained by the word, fed in the Holy Supper, a faith that none but Christ Himself can see. Like dark matter in the universe ... scientists know it is there because they can measure the results of its gravity, but they cannot see it. So it is with faith; it’s invisible to our eyes, but the results of faith are visible as we confess with our mouths and bear the fruit of love.

On the other hand, Jesus still prays for His Church because the evil one is always seeking the corruption of her message, always seeking her demise. Repent, and let us pray to Him who constantly prays for us. Pray “Lord, help us”; pray with confidence, for you know He hears the prayer of His beloved Son, crucified, risen, and ascended for us, who sits now at His right hand, making intercession for us. He defends us from the evil one and his cunning ways. He guards and protects us from the evil of this world. He brings to nothing the errors of the false teachers. He teaches us the Father’s ways as we listen to Him whom the Father sent to lead us in the truth. He calls us to righteous living and loving ways.

The Father has heard Jesus’ prayer. He has given us the apostles and prophets. He has given us the Sacraments. God grant that we devote ourselves to them. God grant us faithful pastors to proclaim the truth. God help us to live our lives, fed by these gifts, trusting in the forgiveness they bestow, rejoicing in the eternal life that is ours in the Son, proclaiming the truth also to others, and loving those whom You send our way. And God grant that we join our prayers to those of the Son, that we may be one in the Son, as God is One in the Holy Trinity.

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