

## PROTECTED IN THE NAME OF GOD

“Christ does not leave his people behind; he prays for them, protects them, and sends them into the world together.”

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

There is something deeply moving in today’s Gospel because we are allowed to hear Jesus praying. Not teaching the crowds. Not answering critics. Not performing miracles. We hear him praying.

And what is perhaps most striking is this: before his suffering, before the cross, before the disciples fully understand what is happening, Jesus turns to the Father and prays not for himself alone but for his people.

“Holy Father, protect them in your name... so that they may be one, as we are one.”

That prayer feels very close to our own realities today. We live in a world where people easily become divided, anxious, suspicious, and exhausted. Communities struggle to remain together. Churches carry tensions. Nations experience conflict. Migrants and strangers often live with uncertainty. Even within ourselves there are moments when we feel fragmented, tired, or alone.

Yet in the middle of all this, Jesus prays for his disciples. He does not abandon them to confusion. He entrusts them to the Father.

The Gospel today comes from what is often called the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus. It is intimate, tender, and deeply pastoral. Jesus already knows that his earthly ministry is nearing its completion. He knows the disciples will soon face fear, persecution, misunderstanding, and suffering. And still, his prayer is not rooted in despair. It is rooted in trust.

He says, “I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do.” Jesus understands his life not as self-preservation but as faithfulness. His glory is revealed not through domination or power, but through obedience, love, and sacrifice.

And then he prays for those who remain.

That includes us.

The disciples in the Gospel are about to enter an uncertain future. Jesus will ascend. They will no longer see him physically beside them. They do not yet fully understand

Pentecost. They do not yet understand what the Church will become. They stand between promise and fulfillment.

That is why the reading from the Acts of the Apostles is so important today. After Jesus ascends, the disciples do not immediately rush into activity. They return together to Jerusalem. And Acts tells us: "All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer."

That small line matters.

The early Church begins not with certainty, strategy, or strength, but with prayerful waiting together.

And perhaps this is a word for the Church today.

Sometimes we become anxious because we want immediate answers, immediate success, immediate clarity. But the disciples themselves had to learn how to wait faithfully. They had to remain together before they could move forward together.

And that is not easy.

Community itself can be difficult. Human beings carry wounds, expectations, misunderstandings, and fears. Sometimes churches struggle not because Christ has abandoned them, but because people forget how to remain with one another patiently and prayerfully.

Yet Jesus prays, "that they may be one."

Notice that unity here is not uniformity. Jesus did not choose identical disciples. Among them were fishermen, doubters, zealots, ordinary laborers, strong personalities, fearful personalities, and imperfect people. The unity of the Church does not come from everyone thinking alike or behaving perfectly. Its unity comes from being held together in the name of God.

That is why Christian unity is spiritual before it becomes organizational. It is grounded first in Christ's prayer.

And today's reading from the First Letter of Peter reminds us that Christian life also includes suffering and perseverance. Peter writes, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you." Those words remain painfully relevant. Many people today carry private ordeals: illness, loneliness, financial hardship, displacement, fear for the future, grief, and disappointment.

But Peter also says, "Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you."

That is not sentimental language. It is a call to trust.

Faith does not mean pretending that suffering is unreal. Faith means believing that suffering does not have the final word.

Jesus prays for his disciples because he knows the world they must face. He knows their weaknesses. He knows Peter will fail and later return. He knows they will become afraid. Yet he still entrusts them with the Gospel.

And perhaps that should also encourage us.

God continues to work through imperfect communities and imperfect people.

The Church has never been sustained merely by efficiency, resources, or human brilliance. The Church survives because Christ continues to pray for his people, and because the Holy Spirit continues to guide fragile human beings.

That is why the Ascension is not the story of Christ leaving the world behind. It is the story of Christ preparing his people to continue his mission in the world.

And the mission itself is not triumphalism. It is witness.

“You will be my witnesses,” Jesus says in Acts.

Witnesses not only through words but through lives shaped by prayer, compassion, forgiveness, patience, courage, and faithfulness.

In a fractured world, the Church is called to become a sign that reconciliation is still possible.

In a fearful world, the Church is called to become a sign that hope still lives.

In a lonely world, the Church is called to become a sign that no one is abandoned by God.

And perhaps this is where today’s Gospel becomes deeply personal for us.

Before the disciples preach, before they travel, before they suffer, before they build communities, Jesus first prays for them.

Meaning that before all our work for God, we are first held by the love of God.

Christ prays for his people still.

And because of that, we continue.

Amen.