

210514 7th Sunday of Eastern Toon Suffys SJ

Holy Father, preserve them by your name, that they may be one as we are one. As long as I was with them, I kept them and watched over them.

Here we hear Jesus' deepest sigh, his deepest desire just before his death: that we humans may be one with each other and with God himself. When we read through the Gospel, we indeed see that Jesus preserved the apostles and the disciples and watched over them. We read in a few places that the apostles were quarrelling. One time they argued about who was the greatest, the most important among them. Another time they were quarrelling because they had forgotten to take bread with them in the boat. Then again they were angry with each other because two had asked for the best places in the Kingdom of God.

The group around Jesus were ordinary people like you and me, with their personal desires and dreams. They sometimes pushed each other aside to gain the favour of Jesus. But, Jesus kept them together all the time. It took Him time and effort and a lot of attention.

Now the apostles and the disciples are on their own. They remember that deep desire of Jesus that they should be one. And they make it happen. The book of the Acts of the Apostles tells us of the problems the first Christians have with each other and how they try to solve them.

- One of the apostles had betrayed Jesus. They choose someone to replace Judas.
- They had a conflict Jews against non-Jews about helping the poor and widows. Deacons were appointed to take on this task.
- Later, there is the great conflict over circumcision: must Gentiles become Jews first in order to be Christians. A council is convened and under the influence of the Spirit they come to a compromise.

There are so many indications of problems in the book of Acts of the Apostles, but each time they look for a solution. They work towards the unity that Jesus prayed for.

We often dream that Christians are one, that we love people, even our enemy, because Jesus asks us to. This does not happen by itself. The unity for which Jesus prays, we ourselves must make, cultivate, keep and watch over it.

It would be easy if we could just get that unity. But all of us who are married or live together with others, even children who want to play together, know that we have to overcome ourselves, our desires and demands, in order to give love, peace and unity a chance.

No one has ever seen God. But if we love one another, God remains in us and his love is fully realised in us. That is what John says in the second reading. We know that God is with us when we repeatedly make that effort to understand the other, to put aside ourselves, our own demands and desires, so that unity may remain among us.

Is there anything more beautiful than two old people who understand each other with a simple glance, but that only comes after years of giving in to the other and of being respected by the other. It is touching to see children playing football together in unison after first arguing about who should kick off?

We all know those moments where we first stood up for ourselves, but then worked towards that unity, often against ourselves.

May I invite you to pay attention this week to Jesus' prayer for unity in your daily life? Look and see, have an eye for how that prayer of Jesus is fulfilled in small and big moments in your own life. Where do you see people who overcome themselves in order to achieve unity, connection with others? Where do you see yourself keeping and watching that unity, just as Jesus did?