

**Sermon for Morning Prayer
Sunday after Ascension Day**

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fifth Verse of the thirty-third Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.²

“... The LORD is exalted; for he dwelleth on high: he hath filled Zion with judgment and righteousness. And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation: the fear of the LORD is his treasure....

“... Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off.... Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities: thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken. But there the glorious LORD will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby. For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; he will save us.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the seventeenth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.³

“These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. I have

manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before

ther, that all who believe in Him may behold His Glory.

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister¹⁷
May 24, 2009.

¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER x (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² Isaiah 33:5-6, 17, 20-22 (KJV).

³ St. John 17:1-26 (KJV).

⁴ St. John 17:3 (KJV).

⁵ St. John 14-16.

⁶ St. John 17.

⁷ *Donald Guthrie, John*, in D. GUTHRIE AND J. A. MOTYER, EDS., THE NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY REVISED 3rd Ed. 962 (London: Inter-Varsity Press 1970).

⁸ St. John 17:1b-2 (RSV).

⁹ St. John 17:3 (RSV).

¹⁰ St. John 17:9 (RSV).

¹¹ St. John 17:16.

¹² St. John 17:15a (RSV).

¹³ St. John 17:15a (RSV).

¹⁴ St. John 17:20-21 (RSV).

¹⁵ Exodus 33:18-23 with 34:5-7.

¹⁶ St. John 17:24 (RSV).

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the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”⁴ In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

St. John places today’s Second Lesson immediately before his account of Our Lord’s Passion. It follows two Chapters that form Christ’s lengthy final discourse to His Apostles and disciples⁵ is thus His final act in concluding His public ministry.

And the manner in which He winds up that ministry is particularly telling: for an entire Chapter of St. John’s account,⁶ Our Lord prays to God the Father. It is this prayer that forms today’s Lesson.

Theme:

This passage is sometimes called “Jesus’s High Priestly Prayer” because it lifts up before the Father three separate but inter-related aspects of the Son’s activity here in earth.⁷ These three are, in order, first Our Lord’s prayer for Himself, then His prayer for His disciples, and, finally, His prayer for the Church.

Development:

1. **First, Jesus prays that God the Father may glorify Him, in order that, through Him, we ourselves may be glorified.**

Christ's words are instructive: "Father, ... glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee, since thou hast given him power over all flesh..."⁸ And the end of this glorification is simply eternal life. Eternal life, however, consists of knowing God and God's own Son who is the appointed way to God. As Our Lord puts it: "And this is eternal life, that they [meaning we] know thee the only true God, and [know] Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."⁹

2. **Second, Christ prays that God the Father will keep us, as His followers, safely in this world.**

As Our Lord tells the Father, "I am praying for them [*i.e.*, for us]; I am not praying for the world but for those whom thou hast given me, for they are thine..."¹⁰

Jesus asks God the Father for two specific things on our behalf. One is that He asks, "Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one." Nor does He pray that the Father will take us out of this world because, by being joined to Him, we are already destined not for this world but for His Kingdom:¹¹ "I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world..."¹²

Instead, His second intercession for us is that we will be kept safe from evil: "I ... pray ... that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one."¹³

3. **Finally, Our Lord prays for His Church, that is, for those who will come to believe in Him through the words of His followers.**

The Christian Church is not truly itself unless it is fulfilling the evangelistic imperative Jesus has laid on it. As Christ himself says, "I do not pray for these [*i.e.*, for us] only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one ... so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."¹⁴

The purpose of this evangelistic thrust is so that those to whom we bring the knowledge of Christ may behold His Glory, that is, His *shekinah* that is the sign of His presence:¹⁵ "Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world."¹⁶

Conclusion:

Thus the three sections of Our Lord's "High Priestly Prayer" set before us a three-part program for, or summary of, the Christian life:

- It seeks to glorify God the Son, who has opened to us the way to God the Father, in order that we may glorify that Father.
- It aspires always to keep His word and to be one body of His followers, in emulation of His unity with the Father, and as a means of keeping ourselves from the Evil One.
- It seeks to bring the world to belief in God the Son, and through Him to belief in God the Fa-