

## John 17:1-11

You learn much about someone by the content of their prayers. Listening to another Christian's prayer gives us a window into their heart. The night before He died, Jesus was praying. It was Maundy Thursday in the Upper Room. Part of His prayer is our text for today. Imagine, we are privileged to hear the very words Jesus speaks to His Heavenly Father! We are given a window into His heart. Some do not want their prayers overheard. Not so with Jesus. His disciples were with Him as He prayed, and the Holy Spirit inspired St. John to write down His prayer for us. This is fitting, for it is you for whom Jesus prays. You, my friends, were on Jesus' heart then, and you still are today.

The importance of Jesus kneeling in prayer before His Father on your behalf is underscored by both our Acts Reading and our Epistle for today. In Acts 1 we hear that the apostles met together to replace Judas "*who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.*" Judas "*was numbered among the twelve,*" and yet he fell away. Jesus calls him "*the son of perdition.*" If one who was called by Christ Himself to be an apostle could fall from the Faith and perish forever, there is not one of us who should think that we can never fall away. How we need Jesus' prayer for us!

In our Epistle in 1 Peter we are told that "*the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.*" Satan has your number. He knows you--your name, where you live, who your friends are. He knows more about you than the NSA does. And he wants to devour you, to steal you away from Jesus. And we are no match for him. How we need Jesus' prayer for us!

"*I am not praying for the world,*" says our Lord to His Father, "*But for those whom You have given Me...I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world.*" A friend of mine was frustrated as a pastor. He was losing church members and he felt sick about it. He confided his frustrations to an old, experienced pastor. "I keep losing members," he woefully mourned. The older pastor looked at him and said, "You cannot lose what was not yours to begin with." Jesus does not pray for the world...for those who were never His to begin with. He prays for those whom the Father has given Him. He is not saying here that He does not love the whole world. In a matter of hours He would be giving His life for every sinner in the world. But He prays here for those whom the Father has given Him out of the world.

He prays for you. In your baptism, God called you out of the world and gave you to Jesus. When a father and mother go to an orphanage, they see many sad eyes, many children, even infants, in need of a new family. And yet they do not adopt them all. They choose a child in love. "*Many are called, but few are chosen.*" God pleads with all sinners everywhere to repent. But most resist His mercy. You, dear child of God, did not resist less. God chose you out of all within the orphanage purely out of His heart of grace toward you. And through you--through your mouth, and hands, and feet; through the money you give and the work you do, He calls still others in mercy; other orphans still in the world, still needing a place in God's family, and He gives them also to Jesus.

And if God has given you to Jesus, then you do not belong to yourself. We use the possessive pronoun "my" so often. "My life...my body...my money...my family...my time...my stuff." Yet, nothing that we have is our own. Our Heavenly Father has given us to Jesus. If we want to be selfish with ourselves, our time, our stuff, then we are challenging Jesus. We are denying His prayer for us. We are declaring, by how we live, that we possess Jesus, not that He possesses us in love.

It is not my "anything." It is Jesus' "everything." The Father has given you to Jesus, and this includes your sin. Jesus speaks of being glorified in His prayer. He is not speaking of the glory He will have in

heaven. He speaks of the glory of the cross. Crucifixion was vile, repulsive, the worst way to die. Jesus went through this and even more. The sins of the world were laid upon Him. We cannot begin to imagine the horrible suffering He endured. And yet, for Jesus, this--the cross--is where He was glorified. For in giving your sins to Jesus, the Father was giving you, in Christ, a place in His family. He was declaring you forgiven. For if your sins were charged to Jesus, they are no longer charged to you. Jesus was glorified on the cross because there your sins were given to Him and, therefore, you belong to Him forever. Your place is with Him in His church where He gives you holy water, holy words, and holy food on your journey to heaven.

Since you and I live in the world, we still face the roaring lion, and we are still confronted daily with the weakness of our flesh and our sinful nature. The devil tempts us to believe that God did not actually call us out of the world; that the Father did not give us to Jesus. And our flesh agrees with him. For we live, so often, as though we belong, not to Jesus, but to ourself.

Look at Jesus' prayer for you. "*You gave them to Me,*" He prays, "*and they have kept Your Word.*" The world does not keep the Word of God. They may keep the Ten Commandments with their hands and mouths, though not with their hearts. But the world does not love to hear the words of Jesus, does not guard, treasure, and keep His words. But for you, God's Word has found a place in your heart. The same living Word that was poured upon your head in Holy Baptism, now regularly comes into your ears, and enters your mouth at the altar. "The ones *You gave Me,*" Jesus prays, "*these have kept Your Word.*"

And yet we confess that we do not have the power within ourselves to keep God's Word in a heart of faith. This is why Luther begins his great hymn with the words, "*Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word!*" It was God who gave you to Jesus, and it is God who keeps you in Jesus' Word. Satan is wrong. Even our own flesh is wrong. Let all doubtings cease. Although still in the world, you are not of the world. The Father, in your baptism, gave you to Jesus. And His words, coming into your ears and mouth, are kept in your heart by His grace. No matter what words the devil throws at you, Jesus is praying for you. You do belong to Him. You are forgiven. Your place is here in His family. Amen.