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John 17:11b-19
Seventh Sunday of Easter
May 16, 2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, Jesus prays to the Father, “I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world... Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In anticipation of his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension – his “departure” – our Lord speaks two quite sobering words. The first is that which ends the chapter before our text. In fact, as St John records it, they are the last words Jesus speaks to the disciples before they leave the Upper Room: “In this world you will have great tribulation. Take heart; I have overcome the world.” *That’s* sobering. The plain language is so intense, it leaves a lump in the throat. And, if it doesn’t, if you brush it off because – after all, he *says* he’s overcome the world – if you ignore the ‘promise’ of great tribulation in this world, then listen to the second sobering word, spoken to *the Father* just moments later: “I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world.”

How does Jesus describe the world’s view of his Church: “the world has *hated* them.” Yes, those who claim that the Christian faith is full of “hate speech” – they’re projecting their hate right onto you, aren’t they? By Christ’s own perfect prayer to the Father, he

acknowledges this is the world's view of the Church *precisely because* it's the world's view of the Church's Christ and His Word: "I have given them your **word**," Jesus says, "and the world has hated them for it." That should be quite sobering in your ears!

How many Christians want to reassure themselves that all is well between the Church and the world by pretending that the things of God are spiritual and the things of the world are secular... the things of God are private and the things of the world are public... that the two never intersect, never touch, never have anything to do with one another. "Pastor," they may say, "preach against the devil and sin and evil, but leave the things of the world out of it." What a mistake!... setting up the naïve for the world's onslaught and, ultimately, the naïve's rejection of the Gospel.

If Jesus himself says the world will hate you for the Word of Truth, if Jesus finds it necessary to pray to the Father to defend you from the evil one on account of the world, then we should sit up and take notice.

But we like to pretend the threats of the devil are in academic books of bad doctrine, harmlessly collecting dust on a bookshelf in the rarely-used "bad theology" section of a musty library, and so, "if I just don't read any doctrine at all, I'll never be endangered by bad doctrine!"

Or, we like to think the temptations and pressures from the evil one will always show themselves in demonic form... perhaps a

real, genuine wrestling in my conscience; perhaps a notoriously evil world figure that hasn't yet met a bullet from U.S. Special Ops; perhaps a Satan-worshipping cultist who is so frightening I'd never dare leave the Christian faith!

But, isn't that sort of Jesus' point: if everything was so frightening in the world out there, you'd steer clear on your own and wouldn't need Jesus' prayers to defend you and lead you not into temptation. But the world *isn't* always frightening; sometimes it's even well-intended! Sometimes it's quite alluring.

It uses phrases and ideas and figures whose outward appeal to good intentions gently mask as a deodorant the bad-hygiene doctrine, the 'stinky' doctrine (but, truly, the poisonous and deadly doctrine) that attacks the Word of Truth. Maybe it's the sweet-smelling aroma of a well-crafted phrase that sounds quite reasonable and so we're tempted to agree:

- "the right to choose" – but, to choose to end your baby's life?
 - "non-traditional family" – but is family defined by *tradition*... or by *God*?
 - "open communion" – Sounds inviting, but against God's command?
 - "my decision for Jesus" – But, does salvation come by one 'giving Jesus permission' to be his Savior?
 - "It takes all of us" – But, is government given by God to prescribe *new* morals upon the Family and Church?
- Of course, the world isn't just a collection of sayings, it's full of innovative concepts that appeal to convenience or benefit (and,

certainly, that can be a good thing. But let's be discerning!): Virtual worship? – because if ancient Israel had livestreaming, God wouldn't have called us to *actually* gather together! Or, individually wrapped, "Covid-safe" communion packets?... because if plastic had been invented, Jesus would have been *honest* about germs endangering the promises of his Holy Supper!

Of course, the worldly ideas extend far beyond worship right into daily life:

- marriage as a status for tax benefit;
- pornography-on-demand,
- atheistic socialism taught in the classroom or workplace;
- the pretense that there's no difference between men and women...
- the dominance of the *virtual* world, so you don't safeguard time for your *real* family and *real* study of the Scriptures to learn God's good order in the *real* world.

Pressured to follow, we go along with the world's ways, adopting the notion that "instant", "innovative", "bigger" is always better; "progress" is always better! Ought the Christian be so naïve to think these worldly *notions* don't affect life when the world urges them upon you as Truth statements by which you are to define/value life?

To *convey* all these statements of truth, there must be purveyors of truth. You rightly steer clear of sketchy *Revivalist* televangelists, but what about the *world's* televangelists? Hollywood, media, sports figures, celebrities, bias news reporters that feign

objectivity – constantly promoting as ‘good news’ the newest philosophy; and constantly filling our ears with worldly fears and tragedies that make us doubt God’s control over His creation or care for His Church. And, because they’re “well-intended,” we listen!

And, sadly, Jesus’ foreknowing prayer isn’t just about the world’s attacks from *outside* the Church, but *inside* – as the Church through history imbibes on worldly notions! How is it that the one universal Church was schismed except that two flesh-and-blood persons (bishops in Rome and Constantinople) gave into worldly greed for power? How did the beauty of Reformation and *purification* of the Church’s doctrine instead become the revolutionary *re-writing* of the Church’s doctrine (no more sacraments, no more bondage to sin, no more universal atonement) except that **persons, theologians** bought into worldly notions of Reason reigning supreme over the Word of God? How is it that, today, entire church bodies champion false gospels that redefine God’s rainbow of promise, His estate of marriage, His six-day creation? It’s not because these evils just come wafting into the sanctuary! They are carried in, by people not unlike you and me, no worse sinners than you or me... people who (like us) live *in* the world, but – bad doctrine leading away from Christ – they’re assimilated to be people *of* the world.

Knowing that all this would be useful weaponry for the evil one in a spiritual warfare that runs much deeper and wider than our

time and place, but even defines your *eternal* reality, Jesus prays for His Church, “Holy Father, keep them in your name.” Comforting!

Now, *true* comfort in this depends on truly interpreting it. While we may rightly *apply* these words to the Church (because, in verses following our text, Jesus does so), we ought contemplate that the “departing Jesus” is initially appealing to the Father regarding the same *Eleven* to whom he just said, “In this world you will have tribulation; take heart, I have overcome the world.”

Of these would-be apostles, Jesus now prays, “Holy Father, keep them in your name.” The word for “keep” is the same as when Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hear the word of God and *keep* it” – guard and cherish. “Holy Father, safeguard them; cherish and protect those who are in your name.”

What comfort for *all* baptized into the name of the Triune God! But, immediate context! – the soon-to-be crucified, risen, and ascended Lord is praying for his first Gospel-messengers. And how important *for our benefit* is it that Jesus states the *purpose* for keeping them in God’s name: “Holy Father, keep them in your name, that they may be one.”

Jesus’ concern isn’t their bodily safety. He knows that many of them will die a martyr’s death. He’s not seeking to defend them bodily, but doctrinally. Are you tempted to protect the body by acquiescing on doctrine? Jesus’ own prayer should remind you: pure

doctrine will lead to the resurrection; but nothing other than God Himself can lead us to and keep us in pure doctrine.

And so, how important that Jesus ask that the Eleven be safeguarded for the purpose of their task – to be those eyewitnesses who would record and distribute the Truth of God’s promise once made in Eden now fulfilled in God’s Christ, so that Christ’s doctrine may be delivered to the saints... so that Jesus may – by extension – include *you* in this prayer: “I pray not only for these but for all who will believe in me through their word.”

And, if by divine extension this prayer is for us, then we should note carefully Jesus’ next words: “I have guarded them and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.” Notice that Jesus admits that one *can be* lost! Yes, in the immediate situation, it’s a “controlled loss” in order that the prophetic Word may be fulfilled. But, the very fact that Jesus says not one other *has* been lost implies the possibility, doesn’t it? How often in the Gospels does Jesus give parables of the lost or the withering or the chaff? How often do his apostles *warn* you and plead with you not to take lightly the dangers of ears itching for some other gospel or the danger of simply growing lukewarm and drifting away from Christ your anchor?

The next sentence Jesus speaks is a stunner: “But *now* I am coming to you.” Things are different now: “While I was with them... But now I am coming to you.” The Messianic mission is done – things

are different now. Didn't Jesus tell the Eleven on the night of his betrayal, "Where I am going you cannot now come"? Didn't he say to the woman on Easter morning, "Do not cling to me for I have not yet ascended to my Father"? Did he not already have in mind his Ascension and Pentecost and beyond when, on Holy Thursday, Jesus promised the Eleven, "I will send another, the Spirit of Truth"... and when that same Jesus said to those same Eleven in the same Upper Room on the night of his *resurrection*, "You are my witnesses ... but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on High"?

Yes, things are different now... but not in a bad way, not in a defeatist way or a degree-of-separation way. Jesus says, "I am coming to you, [Father] and these things I speak in the world, that they (the Church) may have my joy fulfilled in themselves." The turn of events in the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension is not one of despair at separation, but one of the fullness of joy in our new unity with God, who guards and keeps his faithful.

What joy is ours in that Gospel, that Word of Truth which, Jesus says, "I have given them... and the world has hated them because they are not of the world." Notice *why* the world rages. It rages because you belong to Christ and not to *it*. It rages because it believes it has the corner market on truth and, therefore, is the only one allowed to tell you when your joy may be full. What jealousy is the world's! So much so that it seeks to destroy the Church because

the Church is the heir of all truth, life, peace, and – therefore – joy!
And that does **not** sit well with the world!

As the devil's own, it rages... claiming that the Church has a God of hate and demographic phobias. And yet, this goes directly against the Word of Truth, which teaches us to love our neighbor and that – apart from fear, love and trust in God – fear is always sinful! Therefore, the Church takes its stand against the world, not strengthened by hate and phobias but by the Word of Truth: “Remain in My Word, and You will know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free.” Free from sin, from the world, from the world's misunderstanding of its own circumstances: Sin is sin. God's holiness is God's holiness. And sin has separated this world from the holy God. The unholy prince of *this world* Jesus calls the father of lies, a murderer; but the *Church's* holy Prince is the Lord of life and Truth, the Prince of Peace and the Source of Joy.

Now, Jesus does not pray that the Eleven (and, by extension, the Church) be taken out of the world. Thanks be to God they weren't, or else we would have died apart from the good news and drowned in our own sin... a certain eternal victim of ourselves. No, for the sake of the Church, those who bear the Truth must remain in the world. And, to be sure, there's reason for you to delight in the world insofar as it is still the home of God's creation... and its tenant is still the Church militant.

So, Jesus' prayer is not that we be removed from the world, but rather: "Sanctify them in the truth." There's *truth* to be had, and God is the owner of it... not just of spiritual truth, 'religious truth,' 'churchly truth.' But all truth: "Sanctify them in the Truth; your word is truth." And there's why the world is so jealous. For God's Holy Word is still the umbrella truth that governs all of creation – from that *first* day when light was separated from dark, to that *Last* Day when Christ will return in glory and sheep will be separated from goat. Through all creation's days, that Word of Truth is your light, your compass, your comfort and joy. For it points you to one person, one flesh-and-blood person who is trustworthy to bring you into all truth: "For their sake I consecrate myself (I offer up myself as the sacrifice made holy by my righteousness) that they also may be sanctified in truth." There's the mystery that wins the day... Christ has given himself for your salvation... for your *justification* before God, for your *sanctification* from worldly ways, for your deliverance out of this world of the Fall unto the life of the world to come.

That's what Jesus has accomplished, and what he prays for on behalf of His Church... and, as He alone is worthy, His prayer alone is good, He thus **gets** what he prays for... that all who trust in him may say, "Amen. Amen. It shall be so."

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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May 16, 2021