

REFLECTION FOR 7TH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 1:15-17,20-26 1 John 4:11-16 John 17:11-19

Many years ago, one of our elderly Spiritan priests who has been a good role model for me, was dying. His body had lost its strength. He was so weak that he could hardly sit up in his chair. But my friend, priest, and mentor gave me the privilege of one final visit.

He was tired. But with his soft voice, he said to me, "Priesthood is such a wonderful life – and I've had such a wonderful priesthood."

He said to me, "Pray for me, and I will pray for you."

And the last word he spoke to me was simple. One word. He said, "Peace."

I cling to that last word – "peace" - on days when priesthood is busy, crazy, or confusing. That last word: "peace."

We treasure the last words that our loved ones speak to us. Those last words can summarise a whole relationship with that person, our experience of that person, a lifetime of caring.

Last words can even be humorous too.

Do you have a memory of a last word spoken to you by someone whose love changed your life? A last word from someone you love?

We see an example of this in today's Gospel reading. We listen to some of the last words of Jesus. We are in John Chapter 17. Jesus is sitting at the table during the Last Supper. He will soon be arrested. This is the last time he will be able to speak with his disciples as a group. They are hearing his last words.

And what does he say? Well, Jesus prays that the Father will protect the disciples from the evil one. He prays that the Father will give us the gift of unity, just as the Father and Son are united in the Spirit. He prays that we will always be rooted in the truth and experience the joy that comes from Christ.

The last words of Jesus in today's Gospel? Protection, Unity, Truth, and Joy.

Wouldn't Christians of every age be better disciples if we focused on these last words of Jesus, and lived them?

Several years ago, I attended a meeting at a church where I was serving. The parish priest and I were meeting with a small group of parishioners who were not happy with him and had been sending angry and horrible letters to the parish priest. I was surprised by their behaviour.

But throughout this very difficult meeting, I was amazed at the way that the parish priest spoke with this group of parishioners. They shouted with anger – he responded with gentleness. They spoke with arrogance – he spoke with humility. They kept talking about the priest – he kept talking about Jesus.

After the meeting, I asked the parish priest how he had been so kind, and patient and loving toward them. He said, “Well, this is how I prepared for this meeting. I imagined that tonight’s conversation may be my last conversation with these people. I imagined that, after this meeting, I may be transferred from the parish.

“And I kept asking myself, ‘If these were the last words that these people would ever hear from me, what would I want those last words to be?’ Would I want my last words to them be words of anger, or defensiveness, or judgment? Or would I want my last words to them to be words of patience? Compassion? Forgiveness? Understanding? Love? Peace?

Finally, he said, “If these were the last words they ever heard from me, I would want them to walk away having heard me speak like Jesus and speak about Jesus.”

I was amazed. Since that day I have tried always to follow his advice. What a great goal to have each day! If we are all to pray to the Lord every day and say as we begin our day “Lord, let me speak with every person I meet today as if this is the last time that I will say any words to them. And let my last words be words of compassion, truth, gentleness, patience, mercy, forgiveness, unity, joy, love, and peace.

The changes that are necessary in order to realize the unity that Christ prayed for must begin with us. St. Teresa of Calcutta, to the question “what, do you think, is the first things that should change in the Church,” she answered simply “you and I.”

Most of us don’t like change. Change is never easy. But if we want change, it must begin with us. Be the change.

St John Henry Newman once said “to live is to change, and to be perfect is to change often.

How can we live in the oneness that Jesus prayed for in the gospel? The answer comes from the second reading: “*God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God.*” We must then love one another so as to be one and to remain in God. Love one another!

May the Holy Spirit transform us and make us truly one.

Fr Patrick