

Sunday Homily

7th SUNDAY OF EASTER

24 MAY 2020

YEAR A

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK III

"I have made your name known to the men you took from the world to give me."

Illustration

The story is told of a priest who had just been given his first parish. As something of an intellectual, he had spent many years working for the diocese in many different capacities, but had never worked full-time in a parish before. Understandably, he was rather nervous and unsure of himself. He decided his first job would be to visit the First Communion children at home. On arrival at the first home, he was greeted at the door by a little girl. He asked her name. She said it was Lucy. Uncertain what to do next, he said to her, "Do you know who I am?" The little girl promptly ran to her mother and said there was a man at the door who did not know who he was.

Names are important: they indicate who we are. Yet our true identity is only discovered when people are allowed to come close to us. In the Gospel, Jesus has shared his identity with his followers. Yet he has done much more. He has taught them the name of his Father, and shared his sonship with them.

Gospel Teaching

"The Word was made flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory." John opens his account of the story of Jesus with this revelation. As if he were writing a detective story, he gives us a vital piece of information, a key to unlock the mystery. Today we are in the privileged position of being able to hear the prayer of Jesus. Just as we pray for those things that are close to our hearts, so Jesus prays one of his final prayers for his trusted band of followers.

By dedicating himself to his Father, Jesus reveals his identity for us. The glory Jesus asks for is the cross. That symbol of brutality, used by the Romans to humiliate their opponents, was to most people a sign of failure. Yet this will be for Jesus a gateway to eternal life, proving that what the world sees as defeat is really a triumph. He has taught his disciples by a life of service and love, and they have learned how to follow him. As he prepares to leave them, he places them in the hands of the Father. Now they can share in the promised eternal life. We are told how to remain faithful to Jesus: it involves building a relationship with our loving Father.

Jesus has made known to us the name of the Father. He is not the distant figure some have imagined, but one who loved us into being and awaits our turning back to him; who listens, hoping we will call on him using words that his Son taught us. Jesus knows his followers are still in the world, but after the triumph of the cross they now walk in the light of the resurrection. In the prayer we hear today, we discover the identity of Christ our Lord, who dedicates us to the Father. We also see our own identity. Christ becomes our gateway to the Father. As we live in relationship with him and with each other, we become his adopted brothers and sisters.

Application

Some might say that these sentiments are fine for the disciples: they knew Jesus, they saw his glory. But let us remember that John was writing his account for the early Christian community long after the earthly life of Jesus. They were confused as to who they were. They were in a world that did not understand them or their faith. They were laughed at if they confessed their belief in the man from Galilee who died on a cross. The prayer of Jesus is spoken for followers like this.

We too live in a world that doesn't accept the Easter message. It is for us to proclaim to those around us that Christ is risen. We are given the strength to do this by the Spirit of Pentecost. But it is also encouraging to hear that we have been entrusted to our loving Father in a unique way. We belong to a community of faith, one that gathers to share the Eucharist and to celebrate its identity. Who we are is brought home to us when we come together as God's family. No matter what our weaknesses may be, we know that the Father is still close to us. Jesus offers us the chance of eternal life. All we have to do is call on the name he made known to us, praying in the words he taught us.