

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

The setting for today's gospel reading is the upper room on the night before the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus. He has been "pouring out his heart" to his friends and encouraging them to carry on his ministry after his departure. There is a prayer which follows upon the meal and it is referred to as The High Priestly Prayer because of the exalted language (note especially the repeated theme of "glory" which is not an everyday term). The name suggests that it is offered in preparation for the sacrifice he will be making for the sins of the world; it also shows how he intercedes for the disciples in the way that a high priest interceded for the people of Israel. This prayer is often compared with the farewell address of Moses which concluded with a blessing on Israel.

Even though Jesus had said when he prayed at the tomb of Lazarus that "he had no need of expressing prayer because he is one with God in his whole life" which is the kind of union which is expressed in true prayer, he nevertheless prayed here "for the benefit of those present." His "whole life had been a revelation of the Father" so it is appropriate that he conclude his teaching ministry with a prayer suggesting his union with God. His prayer is quite unlike the Gethsemane prayer found in the Synoptic gospels. There, he sweats drops of blood and prays that this cup might pass away from him. By contrast, here in John's gospel, "far from being shaken and shattered by the ruin of all his hopes....(he) blesses God with a full heart for enabling him to carry through the task with which he had been entrusted." At the same time, his prayer here has an "urgent, concerned tone" because of how soon his upcoming departure will occur and the fact that he will be leaving behind his disciples to confront "a difficult world with a critical mission." Nevertheless, "in the gospel of John there is no 'teach us how to pray' followed by the Lord's Prayer. *This is the Lord's Prayer according to John.*"

It is "strictly a prayer for believers." It helps describe "the believing community and its relationship to Christ." Here there is "no concern about signs and their function in eliciting belief (even though signs are a distinctive feature of this gospel). The signs are a part of the work that Jesus has *completed*, and they have produced the desired fruits in the disciples. Through Jesus, they now recognize that the Father is the only true God and that Jesus Christ is the one sent by him. And in believing this, they have eternal life." I will take up the meaning of that expression in a moment.

John uses the word "given" 17 times in the prayer presented here. Why is this important? According to some scholars, the words *give, given, support, hand out, be generous, etc.* tell us something about the "patronage" system that characterized life in the Mediterranean world of the first century. In this system, *patrons were powerful people with control of resources who were "expected to hand out favors to inferiors."* In

the New Testament God was seen as the ultimate patron. Brokers mediated between patrons and clients. They controlled second-order resources (for example, strategic contact with or access to patrons.) Jesus is cast in this role in John's gospel. Clients were those who were dependent on the largesse of patrons or brokers. In exchange they owed loyalty to those upon whose generosity they depended. In the New Testament, the language of 'grace' is the language of patronage. God distributes resources which are often mediated by a broker to clients, here represented by the disciples.

The word "send" also belongs to the vocabulary of patronage. In John's gospel, we are told that God sent his Son into the world 43 times, whereas that language is found only once in Mark, twice in Matthew, four times in Luke and just once in Paul's epistles. The sent messenger is "beholden to a patron and acts as an intermediary between patron and those to whom the message is sent."

In a patronage system, honor is "a public reputation," symbolized by one's "status or standing in the village together with the public recognition of it." If you claim honor that is not publicly recognized, you play the fool, and to try to claim honor for oneself is shameful. So, when Jesus says that he does not accept glory from human beings, he is actually rejecting a core value of Mediterranean societies at the time this gospel was written. This is another way of saying that only God "has the wisdom to legitimate an honor gain." And Jesus asks God to glorify him "precisely when the world will shame and humiliate him."

The number of times he uses the term "glory" here can make the passage difficult to de-code until we recall the lovely words of the Prologue to John's gospel: "*and the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*" For John, "the glory of the son...finds its culmination in the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus must be lifted up so that he might draw all people to himself." That is to say, that when he declares at his death that "it is finished," it is "his *work* – his glorification – that will be finished at that point." It can be helpful to recall that "Biblical writers sometimes used the term *doxa* or "glory" for the way the power of God is brought within the realm of human experience," and in John's gospel, "Jesus manifested his glory by turning water into wine at Cana...and by bringing Lazarus back to life." By these and other miraculous acts, he "revealed divine glory by revealing divine power."

Jesus "came to this earth because of the Father's love of the *kosmos* that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." The Greek word *kosmos* in John usually means "those at enmity with God" or those opposed to the ministry of Jesus. Or it can simply be a description of secular society or another way of identifying "people without God." But eternal life here is defined as "relationship to the Father." Thus, for those who know the Father, "eternal life has "already begun." It is "available in its entirety now." But if it begins now, it simply continues in life beyond the present one. The key element

is that it is defined in terms of relationship, not *time*. Eternal life is thus defined as knowing God. In knowing the Son, “we experience the glory of God.” In knowing Christ, “we belong to God.” To *know God* in the Fourth Gospel “has no connection to cognitive constructions, creedal consents, or specified knowledge about God. Rather, knowing God is synonymous with being in relationship with Him.” And perhaps the greatest examples of discipleship (which is the ongoing relationship with God) in the New Testament are the Samaritan woman at the well, the blind man, Mary, and Thomas ---- because they “have lengthy, increasingly deep dialogue with Jesus and as they do, they understand him...which leads them to worship him and testify to others about him.”

Let me extend the explanation. “The notion that knowledge of God is essential to life (salvation) is common to Hebrew and Hellenistic thought.” For John, that knowledge is closely associated with faith which “includes correct ... understanding, moral alignment through obedience and the intimacy of union --- (in other words) shared life (because the life of God is eternal --- defined as unending or timeless.” But John is using these terms to suggest a certain quality of life rather than its *quantity*. In Jewish thought, “life in the age to come is characterized by a restored relationship with God.” If we can recall this clarification, we can better understand what Jesus is saying here: “the life to come is already present in Jesus and made available to his disciples” and at its heart, it is about “intimate relationship” with the Father.

The purpose of Jesus making God’s name known to the disciples is “not that they would have information about God, but that they would have *intimacy* in order (he would have said) that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

O God, King of glory, do not leave us comfortless, but send us your Holy Spirit to strengthen us, and exalt us to that place where our Savior Christ has gone before; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen

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