

SERMON FOR THE 7TH SUNDAY OF EASTER, MEMORIAL DAY EVE 28.V.2006, 8:30 & 10:00 A.M.
EV. LUTH. CHURCH OF SAINT JAMES THE APOSTLE / BROGUE, PENNA.
ACTS 15-17, 21-24; PSALM 6; I JOHN 5:9-13; JOHN 17:6-19
HOLY COMMUNION – SETTING 2



Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was
and Who is to come! ✠ Amen.

AND NOW I AM NO LONGER IN THE WORLD,
BUT THEY ARE IN THE WORLD,
AND I AM COMING TO YOU
HOLY FATHER, PROTECT THEM IN YOUR NAME
THAT YOU HAVE GIVEN ME,
SO THAT THEY MAY BE ONE,
AS WE ARE ONE.

-- JOHN 17:11

What is 'the world' and who are 'they' in this part of Jesus' high-priestly prayer in John? Are the ones for whom He prays the Apostles only, either the Twelve or the Seventy? Do they include all of His Disciples, at that time numbering in the tens if not in the hundreds of thousands? Do they include all Disciples of all time? Do the ones for whom He prays include you and me? Does this prayer include *everyone*, everyone whose flesh was sanctified by His Incarnation, everyone whose life He wanted to touch with the Father's love, even the enemy, even the

sinner, even the hypocrite? Is 'the world' that place or way of being in which the love of God is not known and the Word about that love is not heard?

If the answer to those questions is 'yes,' then we need Jesus' prayer more than ever, for, where we are 'one,' united, it is usually not as the Father and Son are one, with the Holy Spirit. I would like to invite us to think of the oneness of God as having an application larger than the Church, an application in fact as large as its primary subject. *The triple unity of God* is a unity of life, of energy, of creative love, calling worlds into being and preserving them from falling back into nothingness, calling living things to desire life and to unfold the myriad variety of life forms nascent in their beginnings, calling human beings to live in the image of God by not simply acting on impulse but by acting out of responsibility for each other and for the world God has created. The Father and the Son are absolutely one in this creative will and purpose, united spiritually *for* that purpose.

Jesus prays that we will be one in that way also, for we must live in and come to Him through a world that neither thinks nor acts that way at all.

Where we *are* one, it is a unity almost always *against* somebody or something, united against a perceived, common threat. The effects of that unity can be profound and even moving. In the days following the attacks of September 11th, 2001, and for what seemed weeks afterward, New Yorkers seemed to deal with their fear and grief, and perhaps to brace themselves against more attacks of an even more horrific sort, by trying very hard to give each other a break. Whether in street traffic or on the sidewalks, subways or busses of the Metropolis, life was quieter, gentler and people were visibly considerate of their fellow sufferers' jangled nerves. One wag commented that it came as something of a comfort to see a little public rudeness return to daily life, perhaps a sign that the worst had passed. When the American counterattack began in

Afghanistan, morale seemed to tighten in the national gut in support of the surgical removal of the heart of the terrorist command structure and the toppling of a ruthless regime we had helped to put in power.

Today we may wonder and some may ask whether we know how to do anything else, whether there is anything other than fighting back against our enemies that can unite us as a people and unite us with our allies. Will we be one against a non-human enemy we cannot see and can barely imagine if a pandemic actually does encircle the earth? Can we practice unity where defense of not own life but that of others is at stake, as in the ongoing struggle against racism in our hearts and in our society? Will we be one and the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one?

If we had found that Godly unity long ago, there would be no Memorial Day, no war graves to decorate. Along with the loving remembrance of their sacrifice, fresh flowers and flags

placed carefully on Veterans' graves bear silent witness to the fact that our unity is not the union of the Father and the Son. Though Christlike in the laying down of their lives for the ideal of freedom, or if not for an ideal, then for their country, or if not for their country then for their comrades, the oneness of the military unit is to fight against chaos and death, and the Veteran's suffering or death is to that end, leaving to others the great and largely unappreciated privilege of living in peace, of living in time taken for granted by all but the Veteran.

Not united *against*, but united *for*—**THAT THEY MAY BE ONE, AS WE ARE ONE.** The German poet Friedrich Schiller wrote, "A merely fallen enemy may rise again, but the reconciled one is truly vanquished." How much of world history—and not world history only, but our own dealings with others!—is summed up in the first part of that aphorism, but how little experience 'the world' has with the other part, with peace through reconciliation, with oneness for the sake of the

other, not against the vanquished enemy. Schiller's own country, in its process of reunification, and ours in our dealings with it after the Second World War, present rare examples of a Godly unity breaking out in the world. Indeed, our own country would not be one nation today had it not been for the determination to set aside retribution and to practice reconciliation, to offer a unity that included the vanquished other half of a war-torn nation.

In Christ, we participate in the dynamic unity of God. But where in our lives do we begin to apply that unity, to live that oneness? Our Lord commanded us to 'love the enemy,' that is, to go right to the most obvious point of conflict and disunity and to declare the unity of God right there, with that person or with that nation. In the years leading up to the so-called 'Great War,' the First World War, Professor Jean Jaurés worked tirelessly to do just that. In his country, France, everyone was asking with whom the French should form an alliance against

their old enemy, Germany. Should they sign a two-way promise to fight for Great Britain or Russia, or both, against Germany and its weak ally, Austrian-Hungary? Jean Jaurés wrote to anyone who would read and spoke to anyone who would hear, that that idea, as logical as it might sound, was, madness. He preferred to speak in the great churches of Europe, where that was possible, because what he had to say was sacred truth. The alliance France needed to guarantee peace and to protect the lives of millions of people was precisely *with the old enemy*, with *Germany*, and not with anyone else. He was, of course, accused of being a traitor for even suggesting such a thing, and he was finally assassinated for that reason. But, as it turned out, that was precisely what should have been done, and his idea of including the enemy in the project of building a common future of peace was the only thing that could have saved humanity from two world wars in rapid succession and the cost of some 70 million lives lost and countless more ruined in ways beyond

telling, the world broken to pieces on its idea of unity, not God's. So little has changed.

But Our Lord Jesus Christ offers His prayer for *all* time. He offers it *still*, and the possibilities of seeing the unity for which He prays are there, even and especially in time of war. Church bells can be melted down to make cannons, but cannons can be transformed into church bells again by the same process. That is the image the poet uses in his great epic, "The Song of the Bell" (Freidrich Schiller, *Das Lied der Glocke*). There is excitement in the city on that day and around the site where the molten bronze is to be poured into its form in the earth. The same heat and power, the same sweat and energy of youth that tore young lives apart on the battlefield or in the tumult of revolution is now poured with skill and hope into that bell. If it is poured with diligent skill and with love, if it rings true, its first peal will be to ring out peace with the very voice of God, and it is so inscribed:

VIVOS VOCO – MORTVOS PLANGO – FVLGVRA FRANGO

I SUMMON THE LIVING – I MOURN THE DEAD – I SPLIT THE LIGHTNING IN TWO

May the unity of Your Church ring out clearly to a divided world, Heavenly Father. May our people's love of peace quiet the minds of friends and enemies who see violence and war as the only way. May we *all* be one, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as *You* are one. Bind us to Your love, and let that love include all.

✠ Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit both now and forever. ✠ Amen.

