

I pray that I may speak in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

On Thursday we celebrated the Ascension of our Lord Jesus. Jesus had accomplished what he had set out to do next part of bring Salvation to the world was up to the disciples, but of course Jesus knew that the disciples would need the help of the Holy Spirit, so he tells them to wait for Pentecost which is a few days away.

Our reading from the Book of Acts gives us a bit of an insight as to what was happening during this time. Peter is becoming the disciple's spokesperson, the group has grown to about 120, and he had raised the concern that the death of Judas had left a vacancy among the twelve Apostles.

Why was it important to do this? In Judaism numbers have a symbolic significance, 12 indicated completeness. There had been 12 tribes of Israel, 12 is the first number to have multiple ways of expressing it, Aaron's breastplate had 3 rows of 4 precious stones representing the tribes, the new Jerusalem was to have 3 gates on each of its 4 sides and although Peter didn't know this at the time the 12 foundations of that new Jerusalem would have the 12 names of the Apostles.

That's why it was important to find the right replacement. They needed to be someone who had ministered publicly and had been a witness to his resurrection.

This was very critical because the Apostles were the official witnesses. It would seem Joseph Barsabbath and Matthias met this set of criteria and the disciples cast lots to decide as this was an established Old Testament way of letting God make the decision. Matthias was chosen. Though with Pentecost just around the corner this would be the last time lots are mentioned in the Bible as they would have the guidance of the Holy Spirit. So Matthias, although we don't know very much at all about him, was chosen to be the 12th Apostle.

The Apostles testimony to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus was indeed the foundation of the early church and John in his 1st Epistle talks of the importance of that testimony in the hearts of the believers.

But since the Ascension and the Day of Pentecost it's the testimony of Holy Spirit that gives us the assurance of Eternal life and enables us to confess the Jesus is the Son of God.

In John's mind eternal life is a present possession given by God to those who believe in his Son. It's not the mere consequence of believing or not believing but is the content of the testimony so accepting or not accepting that Jesus is God's Son is the condition of experiencing life. This eternal life is not some quantitative longevity but life as God intended it to be.

In John's Gospel we are reminded that Jesus had come to be a revelation and to gather his apostles. Only as people saw the Father at work in Jesus would they have a proper concept of God. Jesus knows that after his Ascension it is they and the later disciples who would have this task. 3 criteria are mentioned about what it takes to be a disciples: they accepted his teaching (unlike the Pharisees and those who did not): they knew for certain that he and what he said came from God and they had faith in him. This is what made these disciples different from those who had been Jesus' audience. How do we measure up? Jesus is looking forward to at time after his ascension when they would face difficulties in their mission to the world and it was going to be important that the early Christian communities kept together when they were threatened.

So Jesus prays to his Holy Father for unity. This way of addressing God is unique in the New Testament and it suggests both remoteness and nearness and both awe inspiring and loving. The adjective Holy is usually reserved for the Spirit but it prepares us for what will be said about the sanctification of Jesus and his disciples. 2 words punctuate Jesus' prayer for his disciples Protect and Sanctify and he continues with his demand for unity that they may be one as he and the father were one. This is just as important now as it was then something that we have been given but have not yet achieved. The Unity that the Father and the Son have is the foundation of the unity that the disciples have for each other. Just as the Fathers love is the foundation for the love we have for each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Jesus sanctifies himself to do God's will by setting himself apart and being prepared to sacrifice himself by dying on the cross thus sanctification implies a sacrifice for their sake. The fact that Jesus' death on the cross coincided with the Jewish Passover Festival reinforced the idea that Jesus' sacrifice was their protection but this was not just for them but was also for us, the future believers. This act not only saves us but consecrates us to do God's will as well. But here Jesus underlines that the disciples will share their masters fate in their relationship with the world. The truth that comes from the Father through the Son will be their weapon in their Missionary work. The word of God had protected the disciples and now the word of truth would sanctify them.

The trouble was that this had not worked in the case of Judas somehow evil was able to influence him and the choices he made. As in the Lord's prayer there is some ambiguity between evil and the evil one but whatever is meant we do need to pray each day not to be led into temptation and be delivered from evil.

John invites us to apply this prayer to our fragmented Church struggling to unite just as the early church struggled and faced difficulties. The world is hostile to God and the people of God but the world is where we live and work. We need to pray that we too may be sanctified and protected so that we can fulfil our mission and make Jesus' joy complete and enable others to experience the full measure of his joy and life as God intended.

We have around us many great prayer resources and this is the perfect time between Ascension and Pentecost to use them. **Christian Aid & Thy Kingdom come, Parish Prayer diaries, Prayer leaflets,**

The refurbishment of the south porch is intended to be a special prayer space. A place where people can pray or leave a request for prayer.

Prayer has to become a natural response to human need and we have to make it easier for people to pray in whatever form that may be.

Prayer is a practical way of offering hope to people, for hope that is based on knowledge can be firm and confident and hope is not far from Faith and Love.

Lets pray that neighbours, friends and family alike will find sanctity and protection in God's Kingdom . Amen. [1209]