

Lenten Devotional March 4, 2022

Scripture

John 17:9-19

9 I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11 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. 12 While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. 13 But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. 14 I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 15 I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. 16 They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Devotional

The Rev. Dave Dack '11

Just knowing that Christ prays for us is a tremendous encouragement. Of all that he has done for us, this scene of Jesus' prayer in John 17 is perhaps the most touching. Having loved us so thoroughly in his ministry, and knowing he would soon suffer for our sins, Jesus made the effort to pray for us.

Our Savior's prayer was simpler than the thick grammar of John's Gospel suggests. Jesus asked the Father to protect us from the evil one. Echoing the Lord's Prayer in which we ask to be delivered from evil (or "the evil one"), Jesus asked the same thing on our behalf. Jesus wanted God to protect us from the evil one.

People will pay good money for protection. We buy insurance against loss and theft; we invest money to protect against an impoverished retirement; we vaccinate our children to protect them from disease. In our spiritual life, we try to protect ourselves from the evil one by practicing our faith, keeping busy with religious activity, or even by deciding that evil isn't real and "the evil one" doesn't exist.

But only God in heaven can protect us from the evil one. And according to Jesus, this protection takes a very specific form: unity. "Protect them . . . that they may be one." Unity is the best protection against evil, whether personified or not. Of course, unity does not require uniformity, but our best chance of being protected from evil is to remain united in Christ.

May this season of Lent be an occasion for us to recommit ourselves to Christian unity, not only to guard against the divisive schemes of the evil one, but most of all to enjoy Christ together and so fulfill humanity's chief purpose.

Prayer

O God of reconciliation and peace, who loved us first and initiated our salvation, open our hearts and make us willing to pursue unity within your Church, not waiting for others to meet us where we are, but eager to meet others where they are. Bid us to surrender every priority and pretense that keeps us apart and make us one in Christ, that we may overcome evil with good. Amen.