

The title for today's message is: **Jesus Prays For Us**

Jesus said: ***"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,***

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

Let us pray: Almighty God, we give you thanks for revealing yourself to us through your Son, Jesus Christ. We confess our faith in His saving power, and acknowledge Him as our risen, and ascended Lord. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, empower us to be His truthful disciples, help us to discern Your will for our lives, and give us the courage to proclaim the Gospel to those we encounter. This we ask in Christ's holy name. Amen.

This past Thursday, according to the Church's liturgical calendar, marked the Ascension of our risen Lord, as He returns to sit at the right hand of His heavenly Father.

Now, this is an important aspect of our Christian faith for many reasons, two of which I would like to briefly mention.

For forty days, beginning on Easter morning, our risen Lord appeared to His disciples, and then vanished, appeared, and then vanished again.

And I'm sure that each time the disciples experienced the presence of the risen Christ.

Their hearts and spirits were lifted, as they grew to understand the significance of His death and resurrection for their redemption, all the while giving praise to God for Jesus' victory over sin, and death.

But after our risen Lord had revealed Himself on numerous occasions to His disciples, and they came to understand the gift of God's redeeming grace. His mission on earth had been accomplished.

It was time for the risen Son of God to return to His heavenly Father, to receive the glory, which He truly deserves.

And as the disciples witnessed His ascension, it left little doubt, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

But in addition, the ascension of our risen Lord, which again the disciples witnessed.

Marked the end of their expectation of having Him appear to them again, as they lived out the rest of their lives here on earth.

Therefore, the ascension of our Lord tells us that the risen Christ is not simply some spiritual being floating around somewhere in the atmosphere.

But it tells us that, our faith is not one of seeking to gain a glimpse of God in some mystic encounter.

The fact is, our risen Lord has returned to the Father. Look, the ascension of our Lord tells us that.

Rather than looking into the stars in order to try to determine God's will for our lives.

And rather than seeking to find God's presence in some state of spiritual oneness with our inner self, we should look to the life of Christ.

For Jesus truly is the incarnate Son of God, who through His life here on earth, revealed God's Word to all of us.

And through His death and resurrection, grants us forgiveness of our sins, and the ability to walk in newness of life, through God's grace.

You know, I wish the Ascension of our Lord would generate a lot more attention and excitement in the life of the church.

At least as much as Mother's Day, Father's Day, or Thanksgiving, all of which are national holidays.

But the truth is, many congregations today including ours have ceased to celebrate this important festival of the Church.

Yet, for some denominations, they have decided because they can't seem to have their people attend church on a day other than Sunday.

They are now celebrating our Lord's Ascension of this day, the Seventh Sunday of Easter.

Perhaps, this may bring some needed recognition to our Lord's Ascension, but then, what do we miss, in not celebrating the last Sunday of Easter?

Perhaps this seems a bit odd, that following our Lord's Ascension, that we should return to the message of Easter, and prior to our celebration of God's gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

And yet, I believe that the church, through the Spirit's guidance, has given us this time for one last reflection upon the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection.

And what better way to celebrate our crucified, risen, and ascended Lord, than by recalling His last words to us, and to His disciples.

These final words of our Lord, recorded in John's Gospel take place during His last supper with the disciples, just prior to His arrest.

There words that reveal to us as well as His disciples His complete love, and compassion for all who believe in Him.

Now, according to our text, Jesus on His last night with His disciples before His death, prays: ***“Father, I ask not only on behalf of these,*** [meaning His disciples with Him in upper room], ***but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they all may be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”***

Every time I read this prayer, I’m overwhelmed with the Holy Spirit as Jesus extends the grace of God to me, and I hope to you, through His Words.

Unlike in the Synoptic Gospels, in which Jesus is pictured as going off after the last supper to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray.

And its there were also told that Jesus was praying that God might spare Him from the agony of crucifixion.

But here in John’s Gospel were given a different perspective of the same story.

John tells us that, Jesus, being fully human, may have prayed that God might spare Him from the agony of the cross.

But at the same time, he said; Jesus, being the incarnate Son of God, also prayed for His disciples and you and me, before He left for the Garden.

The prayer in which Jesus prayed in the Garden as recorded by the Synoptic Gospels speak true, after all who in their right mind would want to be crucified.

But the prayer that Jesus prays in John’s Gospel, before He left to be betrayed and arrested. shows His divine relationship with His Father.

And also shows His mission of bringing God's grace to fulfillment, that is, for those of us who have been baptized into His death and resurrection.

Its a prayer that tells us that Jesus' submission to the cross, was for our redemption, and that it makes us one with Him, just as Jesus is one with the His Father.

We all should be truly humbled by this prayer of our Lord, for through it, we have come to know the unconditional love of God.

In addition, we have also been humbled by the love of God, which we have experienced through many people throughout our life.

To be one with Christ, is to be one with God. Halleluiah! However, this prayer our Lord prayed, is not meant to be a personal pat on the back.

No! Its more to encourage us as modern day disciples, to take up where the Lord left off, and become engaged in His ministry, which He has entrusted to us.

Listen again to the words of our Lord's prayer: ***"As you Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."***

Now, were doubly humbled with these words. Not only does Jesus pray for us, that we might be one with Him as He is with His heavenly Father.

But He also prays that because we have become one with Him, through our faith and baptism into His death and resurrection.

That we might continue His ministry by being His disciples to the world, proclaiming His Word to others.

And a time for announcing to the world, that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God, the savior of the world.

Yet, as for the disciples, this prayer might have been frightening, as they reflected upon this prayer following His Ascension and prior to receiving His Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

It was a time of reflection, a time to think about what Jesus death and resurrection really meant for their own lives.

A time to examine their own lives, and come to terms with the Lord's Ascension.

Of course, you and I have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit. We live in the time following all of these events.

We know the Biblical stories. We know that Christ was crucified, died, and rose from the grave.

We know that after appearing to His disciples on numerous occasions for forty days, He ascended to be with His heavenly Father.

Yes, we know the end of the story, but we need to pause, and think about what this story in total, means to us.

And on this seventh and final Sunday of Easter, were also called to pause, and think, about our Lord's magnificent resurrection. knowing that Jesus is truly the Son of God.

Yes, the One who is now in heaven with His Father. Yes, we're challenged today to reflect upon God's Word, as recorded in the Scriptures.

And even though God's Word is open to interpretation, we know, through the reading of this prayer to us, that Jesus is our savior

Thank God, He challenged each one of us to hear, listen and understand this prayer for His disciples and for us today, a prayer that we continue His ministry.

This final Sunday of Easter, calls upon each one of us to reflect upon what we can do to further our Lord's ministry.

And to live our lives, each and every day, as if we are one with Christ, and with God, because, as repentant sinners, we are.

Thanks be to God, and the early disciples, we know our Lord's forgiveness, and His power to amend our lives to more fully reflect His saving Grace.

Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.