

The Seventh Sunday of Easter

May 17, 2026

Text: John 17:1-11 (Gospel)

Other Texts: Acts 1:12-26 (First Reading); 1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-11 (Epistle)

### **“Our High Priest in Prayer for Us”**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

On the night He was betrayed, the night on which He instituted the Lord’s Supper, Jesus gave an extended teaching discourse, much of which is recorded by St. John in chapters 13-16. Now in chapter 17 our text begins, “When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said...” So right after this great instruction as part of His prophetic office, Jesus, acting in His priestly office, offers His greatest prayer recorded in Scripture.

This prayer, which takes up the whole seventeenth chapter, has been called Jesus’ high priestly prayer and that is quite proper. As the Levitical priests were to intercede for the people by prayer and sacrifice, here Jesus, right before His sacrificial death, prays for His people, both His current disciples and for all who would become His disciples in the future, believers like you and me. Concerning this prayer, Martin Luther said, “Plain and simple as it sounds, so deep, rich, and wide it is, that none can fathom it.”<sup>1</sup> While fully agreeing with Luther about the impossibility of fathoming this prayer, let us, like him, still preach on it, that we might grow in our own knowledge and faith.

The first thing we notice, which might also surprise us, is that the High Priest begins His prayer by praying for Himself. “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son.”<sup>2</sup> Yet, we must not miss His very next words, “that the Son may glorify you.”<sup>3</sup> The work the Father had given His only-begotten Son from eternity, the work that brought the Son from heaven’s glories to the Virgin Mary’s womb, the work of the redemption of mankind, was finally near its completion.

For it is in this, His willing self-sacrifice, that the Son glorifies the Father in the most complete way. Of course, Jesus glorified the Father, praising and magnifying His name, through His ministry of teaching, preaching and working miracles. So also He glorified the Father in His life of prayer and His perfect faith in His Father and faithful obedience to His Father’s will. These were necessary, so that the Father’s grace was made known, that Jesus was known to be from the Father, and so that He, the sacrificial Lamb, would be without any blemish of sin. Yet, a sacrificial lamb serves its true purpose only when it is sacrificed.

Jesus’ Passion was about to begin. The final sacrifice would be offered in less than twenty-four hours when the Lamb of God would hang on the altar of the cross, dying in the place of sinners, His innocent, sinless, divine blood winning the forgiveness of sins for the whole world. So now, with His mission as good as accomplished, He rightly prays, “I glorified you on earth, having

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<sup>1</sup> Quote found in Fahling, Adam; *The Life of Christ, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.*; CPH, p. 406.

<sup>2</sup> John 17:1. All quotes are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.”<sup>4</sup>

Jesus accomplished the work the Father had given Him. The price for sin, your sin, my sin, the sin of the whole world, was paid by the blood of the Godman. And so now He asks His Father to glorify Him in the Father’s presence, having again the glory He had with the Father from before the creation. Here we see two great mysteries revealed.

The first is the Trinity, at least in the sense of the full and eternal deity the Father and the Son. Two persons, but they share in the divine glory together as there is only one God. (Of course, the Holy Spirit is also included in this reality.) The second mystery is the incarnation of the Son, His becoming true man. For how could He who is eternal God leave the heavenly divine glories, suffer humiliation even unto death upon a cross, and so ask to be restored to the glory He once had? He could be by becoming true man. As true man He is humbled. As true man He is glorified: rising from the dead, ascending to heaven, and sitting at God’s right hand where He exercises all authority in heaven and on earth. In His state of glorious exaltation, Jesus, as true man, now always and fully uses all the divine attributes that were already His as the Son of God.

“You have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”<sup>5</sup>

In these words of our Lord’s high priestly prayer, we learn some deep truths. First, the Father has given to His incarnate Son authority over all flesh, that is, all people. This is wonderful statement of salvation, for Jesus has authority over all people to be their Savior. His life, death, and resurrection is for all mankind that they would have eternal life! The words, “all whom you have given him” touches on the mystery of eternal election. Yet, this is not a fearful statement, *but a blessed one*. For Jesus then speaks the very truth that gives eternal life: knowing the Father, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom the Father sent.

Here there is nothing about some being predestined to damnation as this truth of salvation is revealed to all people. To be saved, a person must know the Father, the only true God. But to know Him, you must know His Son whom He sent, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God.<sup>6</sup> Know by the knowledge of repentance and faith. The knowledge of repentance that recognizes our sins and sinfulness before the holy God, confessing them in sincere sorrow, and the knowledge of faith, recognizing Jesus as the only Savior from those sins, trusting in His completed work for forgiveness. Those who miss out on this salvation do not do so from any lack on God’s part, but by excluding themselves through lack of repentance and unbelief. The ironic tragedy of being condemned by the very Savior whom they rejected.

This is why Jesus says, “I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.”<sup>7</sup> While He certainly desires that others become His disciples and so become

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<sup>4</sup> John 17:4-5.

<sup>5</sup> John 17:2-3.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. John 14:6.

<sup>7</sup> John 17:9.

children of the Father, that is about the limit for unbelievers. For only believers in Jesus can receive the Father's earthly blessings rightly and spiritual blessings at all. One must be a child of God to obtain the gifts God has in store for His children, often already in time, certainly in eternity. It is believers, those who know the Father through faith in Christ Jesus, that receive and possess eternal life. Those who have been united to Jesus' saving work in the blessed waters of Holy Baptism. Those like you!

Dear Christians, consider the comfort this truth gives as you endure trials and afflictions, the confidence it gives you in the face of all your enemies, whether worldly or spiritual. You know Christ Jesus, for He has given You His Word, the words which come from the Father Himself, and you have received them in faith.<sup>8</sup> You are Christ's! You are the Father's. You are children of God whom the Father loves in fullness of divine grace and mercy. You are Christians, bearing the name of Christ who, as Your High Priest, has redeemed you by His blood and still intercedes for you before the Father. And the Father cannot but glorify the Son by hearing and answering His prayers on your behalf, because the Son perfectly glorified Him. Many trials will come, but you shall overcome. Many enemies will attack, but you shall conquer. This must happen, because you are those whom the Father gave to the Son to be His forever.

That is important when we consider our Lord's words, "All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them."<sup>9</sup> Christ glorified the Father by praising Him in all that He said and did, especially faithfully following Him in the face of opposition and persecution, trusting even through suffering, faithful even unto death on the cross. Now Christ is glorified in us.

God's beloved Son, our dear Savior, is glorified in our worship, confession, witness, prayers, praise, and godly life. He is glorified in our oneness in the Church when it is true by being founded upon faithfulness to the doctrine of Scripture. And He is glorified when we endure suffering with patience and faith. He is especially glorified when we bear the cross, persevering in our faith and confession of Christ and His Word in the face of the devil and the world's hatred, spite, opposition, and persecution.

While some are louder and clearer than others, through all these our faith, that is, our holy fear, our trust, our love for Jesus and the Father is declared before the world, yes, even before the angels of heaven and the devil and all of hell. And through it all, our High Priest prays for us: that we would be protected, given strength and endurance of faith, remaining firm and growing as a Christian, until we finally obtain the crown of glory. And the prayers of Jesus cannot be in vain!

Jesus is our High Priest, who glorified the Father by redeeming us and who, even now returned to His glory, still prays for us. *Always*. So may we then, who already have eternal life through faith in Him, pray fervently that we would glorify Him in our lives. *Always*. Amen!

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<sup>8</sup> John 17:8.

<sup>9</sup> John 17:10.