

“Remember, this is not about doing” John 17:6-19

“I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them.

And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.”

Today for our Gospel reading we have this part from so called Jesus High Priest prayer. The whole chapter 17 in the gospel according John consists of this prayer. You see, these words which we read today were not simply a narrative containing something that happened on that last evening of Jesus life.

It is not about what Jesus taught or commanded His disciples to do either. Remember, these verses are not an instruction for us about how to lead our life, or how we as Christians should act.

These words are the Son’s prayer to the Father. Jesus’ prayer to God the Father. On the last evening of His life, just a few hours before He was arrested, humiliated and crucified. It was Jesus prayer.

Today we will try to see what do these words, what does this Jesus’ prayer mean for us? What message does it send to us? What encouragement does it give to us?

Once more, the setting for this prayer is the last evening in Jesus’ life. The last few hours. Just a little earlier He had His last meal together with His beloved disciples. He showed them what it means to serve and to love unconditionally by washing their feet.

Then He gave the greatest gift to His Church, to all His disciples. He gave us His Holy Meal. The Lord's Supper. The Eucharist. The Lord's Meal, where He Himself is physically present to bless everyone who receives it.

Then, while Judas went out to betray Him, Jesus spoke to His disciples as we can read in chapters 14-16, and then prayed to His Father. In all these events you can see what God's love towards you is like. Knowing what was going to follow, where was the focus of Jesus actions?

Yes, on His disciples. Not on Himself, but on His disciples. What would you pray for knowing that in a few hours violent and hostile man will seize you, beat you, flog you, accuse you unjustly and then deliver to be crucified?

We know what Jesus prayed for. For His disciples. But that's not all. It may sound too general and irrelevant for us. But there is more. These words of Jesus prayer are not included in our today's reading, but they follow right after it.

"I do not ask for these only, [that is, for His disciples, who were present] but also for those who will believe in me through their word." (John 17:20) To phrase it differently:

"I pray for those who will believe in me as a result of the apostolic preaching, as a result of having received the written word from apostles, I pray for those who will believe in me because they have heard the Gospel."

Or we can simply pin it by saying, that Jesus was praying for every Christian, who believes in Jesus Christ because they have heard the Gospel. It includes also you. Every one of you, who have believed because you have heard the Gospel.

You see, Jesus prayer is not general and impersonal. It is very personal, as personal as it could be. If someone asks you 'what was Jesus doing before He was arrested and crucified', you can say 'He was praying for me.'

That's right. For He was praying for you. For each of you. His prayer was as personal as it could be. This prayer, Jesus High Priest prayer, is what Jesus prayed for you on the last evening of His live.

Jesus was asking these things from His Father. We all tend to slip in this mood of what should I do to earn God's favour, or at least to be good in God's eyes. But in this prayer Jesus doesn't teach you what you are supposed to do. No, no, no! Instead, He asks the Father to do certain things for you.

I'll repeat it, for it is so important. Jesus prays in this prayer the Father and asks Him to do certain things for us. Not you, but the Father is responsible to make sure that what Jesus prayed for indeed happens.

Let's take a look at who Jesus was praying for, why was He praying, and what was He asking the Father to do. Who He was praying for, why was He praying and what was He asking the Father to do.

First, *who was Jesus praying for?* For all His disciples. Who are Jesus disciples, and who can become Jesus' disciples? Are there any criteria you need to meet first? Quite often people think that you need to match certain criteria to become a Christian.

That not everyone is fitting, not everyone is good enough for Jesus. There are some insights which we can gather from Jesus' disciples. May be you need to be as greedy and selfish as tax collectors were in the first century, as Matthew was?

May be you need to be as self-righteous and power and glory thirsty as brothers John and James, who wanted to destroy villages which didn't invite them in, and were dreaming about places of honour in Jesus' Kingdom?

May be you need to be as boastful and not able to keep what you promise as Peter, who so famously denied Jesus? May be you need to be as cowardly as every of disciples on the last night?

When they spoke about laying down their lives for Jesus, only to run away without looking back, when real danger came a few hours later. Mark even run away naked, leaving his linen close in hands of Jesus enemies.

We could continue this list of different virtues which Jesus' disciples possessed. Greed, sexual promiscuity, debauchery. Tax collectors and prostitutes. They all were counted among Jesus disciples. Real sinners, not imaginary.

The point is, - there are no criteria one needs to match to be loved by God, or to become Jesus disciples. For there is nothing particular in us that would makes us suitable to be Jesus disciples. It is because the Father gives you to Jesus.

Jesus chose you, and not you Him. The Father gave you to His Son, it wasn't your initiative. It is God's work, and not yours, that you believe in Christ, that He is true God, your Saviour, your only way to the Father, your only way to eternal life.

We need to be crystal clear about it. You may be a terrible person. Awfully sinful person. But we can't even compare our sinfulness, our rebellion against God, all wrong, evil and foolish things that we have done with the grandeur of God's grace. They are not even on the same scale.

I once heard our sins compared with a smouldering wick, and God's grace with the ocean. Whatever you have done, whatever others have done to you, however broken your life have been, whatever shameful your passions, they are as a smouldering wick against the ocean of grace.

Drop them before Christ, in the ocean of His grace, and ... they are gone. Forever. Now you belong to Christ. Now you are His. You are not from this world anymore, you are Christ's own. The Father has given you to His beloved Son. You are His.

There is only one thing that disqualifies you from being Jesus' disciple – if you believe that you are not a sinner, if you don't need Jesus. Then even God can't help you. You have made your choice. To stand before God's throne on your own.

Why was Jesus praying for us? That's our next questions. We can see in Jesus prayer, that when we are made His disciples, we face real challenges. As this world hated Jesus, the same way the world will hate His disciples. We are not of the world, but we can't leave this world either.

This is what Christians sometimes, or may be even quite often are tempted to do. To leave this world and to gather in closed communities, where only believers in Christ are together. It is a nice setting to be. You know it.

Among loving and caring brothers and sisters who do their best to serve you and to love you as Christ have loved us all. These are wonderful and warm experiences which we all enjoy so much. Such a safe and encouraging environment.

But, we are not made Jesus' disciples for our sake only. We are actually sent back into this world to testify about the truth, about Jesus Christ. This is our great challenge. To remain in the world, but at the same time - being not of the world.

To be a Christian in this world is not easy. Jesus knew it, and you know it. Because the world around us wants to live according its own desires, it promotes its ways as much as it can. Think about sexual purity.

How difficult is to resist the world which has embraced sexual promiscuity and adultery and a norm? How hard it is for Christians to stay pure? How often we fail... How hard it is to teach our young ones to value and appreciate the gift of marriage and sexuality?

We live in the world where majority believe that there is no such a thing as the truth. Simply different opinions and preferences. How can we show the world that we have the words of eternal life? The truth. The words that can change everything.

We live in the world where sin has become a virtue, and virtue is portrayed if not as sin then at least as foolishness and bigotry. It is very difficult to stay faithful to our Lord Jesus, when the world around you tempts you and ridicules your faith.

These are real challenges for you in this world. To continue to live in this world, and to be not of this world. To be different. To be people of light. To be the salt of the earth. To be holy as you Father in heaven is holy.

This is how the evil one attacks you. This is how the world hates you. If you are different, faithful to Christ. If you are not of this world. If you have your firm foundation in the will, in the words of your God.

If you are not ‘a reed shaken by wind’, if you are not ‘tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by human cunning.’ (Eph. 4:14) If you have in you this peace that surpassed all human understanding. That’s what drives the world crazy.

That’s why Jesus was praying for you. We all need Him to continue to pray for us while we are in this world. So, our last question, *what was Jesus asking the Father do to for you?*

It is very practical. It is very personal as well. Jesus prayed it for your sake. “Holy Father, keep them in your name.” What does it mean? God and His name can’t be separated. We can say, ‘keep them in you, that they may be one, as we are one’.

This is what the Father did and does by sending His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, who dwells with you, uniting you with the Father and the Son and with countless number of Jesus’ disciples in all ages and all places.

Jesus didn’t ask to take us out of the world, but to protect us from the evil one. How does this happen? When you are sanctified in truth. Or we can say, when you are sanctified by God’s word. When God’s word makes you holy.

For God’s word is truth. The Father protects you from the evil one, as you remain in Jesus’ words. When you read them, pray them, study them, meditate upon them. For God’s word is truth.

It is the very opposite to lies of this world. It leads you to truth, to Christ, it sanctifies you, it protects us. For whenever you read, listen, discuss God’s word, the author Himself, the Holy Spirit shows up among us.

This is what Jesus asked His Father to do for you. To grant you His Spirit. Abundantly. Now you can be sure, that the Father has heard the Son’s prayer. You can be sure that He already does, and will do for you what Jesus asked Him.

He gave you His Spirit in you Baptism, He gives the Spirit to you when you remain in His Word, He gives the Spirit to you in the Lord’s Supper. All of these are Father’s ways to respond to Jesus prayer.

Therefore you can rejoice even if the world hates you, as it hated Jesus, the Son of God. For you know that the Holy Spirit dwells with you, that Jesus has chosen you, the Father has given you to Him, and no one can snatch you from the Father’s hand.

Amen.