

Sunday Homily

7th SUNDAY OF EASTER

29 MAY 2022

YEAR C

“I ask... that they may all be one.”

John 17:20-21

Illustration

Two years ago James began attending his parish church. The welcome he received, the spirit of worship and fellowship encouraged him. He got increasingly involved in church activities and soon became a churchwarden.

Then things began to go wrong. The congregation divided over new forms of worship; financial problems became critical and friction crept in about how much people should give; there were discussions about inclusiveness (or lack of it) in the church; James became ill with depression brought on by stress in his workplace and difficulties in his marriage.

He resigned as churchwarden, a role which was becoming increasingly difficult as more differences split the congregation. He confided in a church member about his depression and the tensions in his marriage only to find his confidences broken and his problems becoming general knowledge. He was shocked when a number of people told him that, as a Christian, he should not be depressed and that a lack of faith was preventing his recovery and was also behind his marital difficulties.

James was deeply hurt. He felt let down by people he trusted, rejected by those who loved him and excluded by a once-welcoming community. He began to doubt the existence of the God of love in whom he had put his faith.

How different his experience could have been if his church had been able to live out the love and unity for which Jesus prayed.

Gospel Teaching

The theme of the prayer of Jesus is the indivisible unity between Father and Son. This unity is characterised by love, and Jesus prays that the glory of this loving unity will draw into itself his disciples, and those who become believers because of their witness, so that they will be one with Father and Son.

We, of course, are included in this prayer since we have come to believe because of the witness of his first disciples. It is worth listening to the words of Jesus, holding in our hearts the knowledge that we are hearing Jesus pray for each one of us and for the Church to which we belong. If we pay close attention we

may suddenly feel very uncomfortable about the way we talk about each other sometimes, or the way in which we react when controversial issues arise or we find people behaving in ways that for us are difficult or unacceptable. We may ask the question of ourselves, "What are we doing to enable this prayer of Jesus to become the reality of our life together?"

We hear this prayer today in the light of Christ's "mighty resurrection and glorious ascension" and anticipating the gift of the Holy Spirit. We celebrate the victory of love over hate and life over death. But we should also hear this prayer on Maundy Thursday when betrayal, injustice, cruelty and the unspeakable agony of the cross lie ahead. If we are called to be one in the glory of the loving unity of God then we are also called to be one in the darkness and pain of this world experienced by the Son who was sent by the Father.

Application

There will always be differences in the Church – between denominations and within congregations. We are, after all, only human. Our calling, though, is to deal with these differences in ways which seek understanding, tolerance, acceptance and a love for one another that transcends our divisions.

Jesus prays that we will grow into unity with him and the Father for our own sakes, that we will be at one with the God who is the source of our being.

He also prays for this unity because it is through our manifestation of God's love and unity that others will come to believe in Jesus and in the Father who sent him. When we are divided and hostile in our divisions; when we offer love and support only towards those who comply with our belief system and only when things are going well; when we exclude those of whom we disapprove because of their gender or sexual orientation, then we cannot be surprised when the world rejects us and the God we claim to believe in.

When we can find healing for our divisions; when we can love all people as brothers and sisters; and when, like Jesus, we can welcome all who turn to us, then, and only then, might people come to know a God of love who wants to draw them into the glorious, loving unity of his being.