

## Sermon text - May 16 2021

### Gospel reading: John 17:11b-19

[Jesus said:] “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.”

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In today’s gospel we see Jesus praying for US... asking His Father in the name, that the Father gave HIM,

*“Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name YOU gave ME.”*

I was reviewing the catechism this week, and was struck that we don’t often give much attention to the second paragraph of the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment; we just sort of take it for granted and rush on the next. It says we are to have no other gods. Sure, that means that we won’t make any graven images of God or bow down and worship them, but that *also* includes this warning...

*“for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.”*

There is a great deal of discomfort in those words, but also a great deal of blessing.

“For the sake of my father’s who loved you, O Lord, and kept your commandments, hear now MY prayers. I am my father’s child. Bless me also, and hear *my* prayer.”

Jesus is saying remember who my father is. His name can bless or curse. We are cursed in association with our father Adam’s name. But we are blessed in association with the name we are given in Jesus. The name the Father blessed him with also blesses *us*.

The sanctification that he wraps about himself He also wraps around US. That's what that bit about consecration is all about. He of course is already holy. He does not need to sanctify himself, as he is the source of all holiness to begin with. But He tells of this so that we become aware that what is done to Him is also done to us. As He is wrapped in holiness, so are we.

And this holiness, He tells us... is truth.

*"Sanctify them in the **truth**,"* He prays on our behalf, *"Your word **is truth**."*

When Jesus stands before Pilate, we have this important conversation about TRUTH...

"So, you are a king, then?" said Pilate.

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

Pilate replied, "What is truth?"

I think it is that answer, more than anything else that was said or done by the Roman governor of Judea, that humanizes him. It's impossible for me to read his reply to Jesus and not hear a man utterly exhausted by all the lies in his life. All the falsehoods masquerading as reality. Wading through the swamps of lies, the lies the Jews are telling him so that they might have him murder their enemy for them. The lies his government tells him in posting him to this important and strategic position. The lies his servants tell him concerning the work they do in his name. The lies his wife tells him concerning her complete love and devotion to him. The lies his children tell him about what they do with their time. The lies his friends tell him whenever they socialize together. So many lies, all pretending to be truths... Even the lies he tells himself, let alone the lies he tells others. The lies that he thinks are the truth, not because he knows them to be true, but because he has trusted the lies of others and believes them to be the truth.

And to be honest? He's afraid of any real truth to be told. Truth exposes the lies. The real truth would expose his own infidelities, his own inadequacies, his own flaws... prove him to be silly and weak and foolish ...or even worse... prove him to be wrong. Real truth can't be allowed.

If this Jesus is who he claims to be -- the TRUTH and the Light -- Pilate in good conscience OUGHT to destroy him. And I think that's why I find Pilate a person I have sympathy for ... at least in this instance... because he acts contrary to his nature and tries instead to stand up for the truth.

But like so many of us, Pilate proves to have feet of clay. He is shut down by those who are filled with fear and anger, who will invent so-called truth in the form of false witnesses and hyperboles and even bald-faced lies. What IS truth when no one can stand to listen to it?

It becomes so easy to say, "The devil take you. Do what you want. I wash my hands of it."

Yes, I think Pilate can be an awfully sympathetic fellow. But what does he accomplish by withdrawing his protection, withholding justice? An innocent man is brutally tortured and put to death, and dozens if not hundreds of people are broken and left to suffer and grieve.

And he can console himself with sweet little lies... "I did all I could do. Sometimes you have to please the crowds. It's just a little compromise." But don't you dare ask yourself how many compromises you can make before you have no integrity left.

One of my favorite lines from "A Man for All Seasons" (1966 with Paul Scofield) is this... *"When a man takes an oath, Meg, he's holding his own self in his own hands. Like water [he cups his hands] and if he opens his fingers then, he needn't hope to find himself again. Some men aren't capable of this, but I'd be loathe to think your father one of them."*

Parents, that's one of the reasons, by the way, why I sit down with you and your child before the Rite of Confirmation. We are asking your child to make an oath before God. A very serious oath. And they ought to be very sure they can make it. It's one thing to lie to ourselves or our parents, the congregation or even lie to me. But it's quite another thing to lie to God.

Some people are capable of this, but I would be loathe to think we are among those who would lie, even to God, let alone to one another. But we do. And some of us lie so often and so easily that we are no longer aware we are even doing it. And we are so very sure that we know the truth and everyone else is wrong.

When in reality, the only truth we CAN know is God's Truth. And God reveals his truth to us in His word. And His word is Truth and that Word is made manifest in our Lord Jesus Christ. And that word is not subject to our opinion. It is revealed to us in Scripture. And it claims to be what it is: God's Truth, Holy and Sanctifying truth. And in that truth, we are protected and comforted.

You want a hard truth?

The world is not safe.

The world is not our friend.

The world rejects the Word of truth we bring.

We are to bring it anyway.

If you believe that telling the truth is of divine significance, then you will live out that truth in your life. In addition, you will take the consequences of that.

It doesn't always mean that you will always be happy in this world.

But another hard truth is this...

You will suffer the consequences of telling the truth or of NOT telling the truth. Either way... You can't avoid the consequences. You will suffer them, one way or the other. You might be able to delay the consequences in the short term by not telling the truth or by keeping silent when you should speak. But often you are only compounding the inevitable, the day of reckoning when the truth is revealed.

Once again be careful of what we are talking about here. We are talking about God's Word.

We are consecrated in, by, with... God's word. We are made Holy by the outpouring of the Gospel.

The WORLD deals with its own truths. For example: coffee... I haven't checked this week. Is it the worst possible thing to pour into your body, the cancer-causing killer or is it the life-giving savior full of antioxidants? Good or bad, no one can seem to agree. Pros and cons of coffee change from month to month... And there are a thousand and one other examples.

The truth is that there is only one life-giving savior. And that is our Lord Jesus. And what is the word of our Lord Jesus? Love your neighbor as yourself. The command is to love one another. Not dictating to one another, or threatening or frightening or belittling or insulting... but loving. As Christ loved us... and laid down His life for us.

We are living in strange times, times when no one seems able to agree with anyone about anything.

Why are people afraid of the truth? Because the truth hurts.

Life is fatal, full of suffering, malevolence, and betrayal. There is nothing about that that's trivial. It's all profound. And if you are going to survive that, you are going to need a relationship with something profound. What could be more profound than the truth?

What would you rather have on your side than the truth? You might say "That's obvious, and everyone should do that." But then you need to ask yourself, why you don't.

Possibly because you're still healing from the burns. The truth burns away the dead wood... And the truth is there is no shortage of dead wood to burn off.

This is the meaning behind what Jesus says, when every branch that does not produce fruit is cut off and every branch that does produce fruit he prunes, so that it will produce even more fruit. But it hurts. The truth hurts, surgery hurts. And there is no shortage of pain when this happens. And that's why people are afraid.

And that's why *living out our faith* is such a risk.

Jesus said, I am the truth, and the truth will set you free.

You believe that. This is a divine truth, a truth that makes you free, raises you up above the lies of the world, and when you decide that you are going to live *as if that matters* -- because, ultimately, it *does* matter -- then everything about yourself that isn't worthy of that ideal must be cut off and die.

And that might be most of who you are. And that's a terrible thing to contemplate. But compare it with the alternative, where nothing of who you are will survive the fire.

Or at the very least compare it to the little hells that we create for ourselves in the here and now; When the lies -- that we live in and live with -- turn the world around us into awful places to exist.

Lies produce misery. Only ever.

We think of them as sweet, helping us to get what we want, helping us avoid the pain of loss or rejection. But the truth will always come out. And it will expose the lies, and the betrayals.

If we think that we can keep those bits and pieces, and hold on to them and take them with us, then we are lying to ourselves, and the truth is not in us. Does that sound familiar? It should.

Jesus' prayer for us should comfort us. We are under His protection. We are under His Name. We are wrapped in His righteousness. Telling the truth may not always produce the best outcome *from our point of view*... It can lead to people turning away not only from US but from the truth... But ask Job about how things appear to *us* compared to how things appear to *God*.

Telling the truth will always produce the best possible outcome. Because telling the truth is speaking God's word. And speaking God's word can only, ever be good. And sometimes we can't see how that could be possible, when a lie could cover it all over and hide the painful truth.

But God is truth. We mustn't forget that and hide His light under a bushel of lies.

Allow me to share a final word of wisdom from St. Peter... *Always be prepared to give an answer for the Hope that you have. But do so, with gentleness and respect. Amen*