

FR. FRANCIS MAPLE – PANTASAPH FRIARY

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

(Two sermons)

HELPING TO GET JESUS' PRAYER ANSWERED?

Jn. 17:11-19

A man went sailing for the day with his son but by late afternoon a storm was brewing. The son wisely observed that Mum would be praying for them to have the sense to set sail for home. The father said, 'You're right lad. You know how she worries about us. I'll hold the rudder, while you run up the main sail, and we will get Mum's prayer answered.' The father had a point. There are times when we should heave to and help answer a prayer, rather than stand by and wait for God to do it.

That thought has relevance for today's Gospel reading. Jesus the night before He died prayed to His Father, for His followers that they might be in the world but not of the world. This is not always easy to fulfil. At times in an attempt to achieve holiness, we have tried to isolate ourselves from the world. This is not what Jesus wanted.

In His prayer He specifically said, "I am not asking you to remove them from the world." At times we become so adjusted to secular society that we think that the Church and the world are the same thing. This is not what Jesus wanted. His prayer was, "They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world."

It requires a considerable amount of wisdom and courage to find the middle ground between the two extremes. Saint Paul's challenge to the Church in Rome was, "Do not conform yourself to the present age, but be transformed by the renewal of mind so that you may judge what is God's will." Today there are too many liberal minded Catholics whose attitudes are tuned into the world's way of thinking and behaviour, and not to that of the Catholic Church.

Living together before marriage seems to be permissible and acceptable among some Catholics. They will tell you, they love each other and one day they are going to be married, so what's wrong with sleeping together before marriage? And besides everyone is doing this. Because everyone is doing it does not make it right. Jesus and the Church call such behaviour fornication and mortally sinful. Some people who commit this sin think nothing of going to Holy Communion whenever

they come to Mass. They should first be sorry for what they have done, be intent on changing their ways and make a sincere Confession before going to Holy Communion.

Again, liberal minded Catholics will tell you that it is not necessary to go to Mass every Sunday but they are still entitled to receive Holy Communion whenever they attend Mass. This has never been the teaching of the Catholic Church. That one hour we give to God is very important. God wants us to spend that time with Him. We offend and hurt His majesty if we do not give it to Him. One of the Ten Commandments given by God Himself to Moses teaches that we must “keep holy the Sabbath Day” and it is a mortal sin deliberately to miss the Sunday Mass.

Sadly, there are some Catholics who have had abortions, agreeing with the world that the woman has the right to do with her body as she pleases. The Church tell us that once conception has taken place God creates a human soul which is sacred and under no condition can that life be destroyed. Abortion is murder.

Many Catholics do not realise that in vitro fertilisation is forbidden by the Church for the reason that the marriage act should take place in the natural manner God planned.

How many times have I heard ‘practising’ Catholics say, when they hear that a Catholic divorcee has found a new love in their life, they are pleased that someone is making them happy again! The Church teaches that although there can be a civil divorce to help the innocent partner there can be no other marriage until a spouse has died.

In recent years the practise of homosexuality is accepted and it is still against the God’s teaching of purity. From the story of Sodom and Gomorrah we know what God thinks of such a practise. St. Paul in his epistles makes it very clear that sodomites shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.

These are just a few ways in which Catholics join forces with the world yet Jesus tells us that we should be in the world but not part of the world. We might have to witness every day the earthly parade of God's laws being rejected, but we must not keep in step with those around us. Our orders come from the King of Kings and His Church.

This does not imply that we who try to remain loyal to the teachings of the Church think ourselves to be more deserving of Heaven. It simply means that we hold ourselves more accountable. We are to care a little more, love a little deeper and try a little harder than those who have

never known Christ. Jesus prayed that we might live in the world and yet be different from it. By our way of thinking and our behaviour we have to try and get that prayer of Jesus answered.

The Gospel reading comes to an end with a prayer for our usefulness. Jesus said, "As you sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world." Our Lord lived His entire life under a sense of mission. He had a job to do and spoke of it often. That was Jesus' task ... to seek, to save, to serve and to sacrifice Himself for the sake of others. He has sent us into the world on the same mission as the Father sent Him. He prayed that we would have the strength and courage to carry it out. How can that prayer ever be answered without your participation and mine? We have a job to do. It doesn't have to be a big thing. Most of the time, it will seem small, even insignificant.

Lord Jesus, on the night before You died, You prayed for us. It was a powerful prayer. By working together, each one doing his or her best in some measure, we can get Your prayer answered.

JESUS PRAYS FOR US TO BE SAFE FROM THE CLUTCHES OF SATAN

Acts. 1:15-17,20-26; 1 Jn. 4:11-16 & Jn.17:11-19

Today's Gospel passage is an extract from the Priestly prayer of Jesus, that is, the prayer which Jesus prayed for His disciples just before He went out to suffer and die. It is a prayer in which He entrusts His disciples to His Father's care, just as a dying person would entrust His loved ones to the care of a relative or a dear friend. How powerful must this prayer be, when the Son of God Himself pleads for us as our High Priest! Now, having ascended to heaven, our Lord continues to plead for us at the right hand of His Father. What, then, was the essence of Jesus' prayer, as revealed in today's Gospel?

Jesus prays for the safety of His disciples. He asks the Father to keep them true to His name. There are two opposing groups which vie for the loyalty of each person. One group consists of people who belong to God; these people accept Jesus as the Saviour whom the Father has sent, and they live by His words. The other group is made up of people who belong to the world; these people, although they would not admit it, pledge their allegiance to the Devil and live by his values which are materialistic and evil. A person cannot belong to both God and the world.

God has chosen and called each person to belong to Him. Those who accept His call and receive Baptism become disciples of Christ. These are the people that Jesus refers to as being given to Him by the Father, and they include you and me. God has taken the initiative and we have responded, at least initially, by accepting His call. However, this response of ours has to be renewed each day until we die. This means that in the numerous events, both big and small, of our daily life, we have to choose God continually and reject the world. Given our fallen human nature, we sadly transfer our allegiance from God to the world. This is what happens when we give into the temptations of the Evil One, the Devil. We are thus fully responsible for the consequences of our choice. Our Lord teaches this point through a veiled reference to Judas. "I watched over them, and not one was lost, except the one who chose to be lost." Judas fell, not because of God's fault, but because Judas chose to be lost. And so the Lord asks the Father to protect His disciples from the Evil One as we also say in the Our Father: "But deliver us from evil."

The sure way to be protected from the Evil One is to be consecrated to the truth, and this truth is to be found in God's word. Those who are consecrated in the truth are those who have anchored their lives to the Gospel, and such people will be safe from the attacks of the Evil One. The world deceives us by presenting falsehood disguised attractively as truth: abortion is upheld as a woman's right; euthanasia is packaged as compassion; terrorism often poses as freedom fighting etc. The values of the world are in direct conflict with the values of God. They confuse the people and mislead them away from the truth. In the Gospel, therefore, we find a safe harbour from the storms of falsehood. And so, the Lord prayed for us that we would be consecrated, set apart, in God's word.

Lord Jesus, when we stand by Your word, the world will hate us and be hostile. We need the courage to stand up and face the hostility of the world. We need not be afraid because You are on our side and we belong to You. As we approach Pentecost, we pray for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit on us, so that, as You prayed, we will be consecrated in God's truth.