

St Philip and St James Anglican Church
Palma de Mallorca Spain
16th May 2021

The Seventh Sunday of Easter/ Sunday after
Ascension Day

Text: John 17:6-19

Introduction

Preaching your first sermon at a new parish is not easy. One is not sure whether people will understand him or neither will they listen to him. At the back of the minds of the majority of you today are identity questions; who is this man? Is he the right person for us? Is he knowledgeable of his job? Will he understand us? This reminds me of a certain seminary story of a first year student who was taking homiletics class for the first time. The course has two parts; the theory where seminarians are introduced to the art and science of preaching and the second part is on the practicalities where one is supposed to preach before the fellow seminarians and teaching staff. This is the most difficult part because as one preaches, fellow seminarians and teaching staff will be marking the sermon and after service and especially after breakfast they congregate in what is called a seminary conference where the sermon of the day is discussed. The sermon is analyzed and

criticized. The whole purpose of the exercise is to improve the sermon and meet the required standards. However, the process is scaring especially for those preaching for the first time. So one student was scheduled to preach on a certain day and he was so scared and he devised a plan. He went to the pulpit and asked this question, do you know what I am supposed to preach today? Fellow seminarians and the teaching staff responded, no we don't know. Then the student replied, neither do I know, he sat down to the disappointment of his teacher. Furious with him, the teacher asked him to preach again the following day. The next day he employed the tactic by asking the same question, do you know what I am supposed to preach today? The fellow seminarians and the teaching staff responded with an overwhelmingly, yes. The student with a broad smile responded, so why do I need to preach, and he sat down to the amazement of his colleagues and his teacher. The teacher now extremely angry asked the student to preach again the following day. The student came with the same tactic and asked the same question, do you know what I am supposed to preach today? This time around the congregants have organized themselves, the other half responded, yes we know and the other half no we don't know. Again with a broad smile on his face the student responded, those who know may you please tell those who don't know and he set down. That is the dilemma of a first sermon to a completely new audience; you are fortunate that I am not doing that today. To dispel identity questions

which may hinder you from listening to the sermon, let me say a few words about myself, I am Ishanesu from Zimbabwe, a country in the Southern part of the African continent. I am married to Caroline who is a little darker than me. We are blessed with three boys and I have been a priest since 2003. Let me end here for now and an elaborate introduction will come at an appropriate time.

Sermon

Shall we pray in the words of Psalm 19 stance 14, "MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH AND THE MEDITATION OF MY HEART BE ACCEPTABLE TO YOU, O LORD, MY REFUGE AND MY REDEEMER. AMEN. Today is the First Sunday after Ascension Day that was celebrated on Thursday. The Ascension of Jesus is the Christian teaching that Christ physically departed from earth by rising into Heaven in the presence of eleven of his apostles. According to the New Testament narrative, the Ascension occurred forty days after resurrection. So if you go back to your calendar and calculate from Easter Day (4 April) to Ascension Day (12 May) you will get exactly 40 days. Our gospel reading today, John 17: 6-19 is Jesus' prayer for his disciples before his departure.

My inaugural sermon as your chaplain will be based on the contents of this prayer.

Exegesis of the Text

This prayer concludes the farewell dinner, which started in chapter 13. Therefore, the entire pericope from chapter 13 -17 should be read in the context of the farewell discourse at the last supper. This is a lengthy prayer in which Jesus continues his address to his disciples, encouraging them to be confident and hope in the face of his imminent departure. It is often called the High Priestly prayer for two reasons:

1. First, Jesus is preparing to offer himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.
2. Second, he intercedes for his disciples in the same way that the high priest intercedes for the people of Israel.

Though Jesus' prayer is positive, we hear an urgent concerned tone. He is about to depart leaving his disciples in a difficult world with a critical mission. The prayer includes several petitions but in my sermon today I am only focusing on three.

1. Verse 11, “Holy Father, keep them through your name, which you have given me, that they may be ONE even as we are one.”

Jesus has been the disciples’ protector. Now he is preparing to depart, so he asks the Father to assume the role of protector to these disciples who are in the world but not of the world. They belong to the Father but dwelling in a hostile world. Though the world is hostile, it is also the object of the Father’s love hence He did not condemn it but send His son to redeem it. The Father’s name represents the Father’s person and character. Jesus is praying that the Father will help the disciples to maintain Godly character. In the petition, he also prays for the unity of his disciples. This is key to a successful mission in the world. We live in a fractured world with broken relationships and with conflicts of different natures. The unity for which Jesus is praying however, is deeper. It goes beyond denominational unity (ecumenism) but it is a unity of heart and purpose. As Easter people we are encouraged not to dwell in feelings of abandonment or despair but to hope in the assurance of Jesus continuing presence.

2. Verse 15. I pray not that you would take them from the world, but that you would keep them from the evil one.

The mission of the disciples is to carry on Christ's work in the world. Therefore, Jesus cannot remove them from the world. They will do their work in a world to which they no longer belong and in which they no longer feel wholly comfortable. Jesus prays not that the Father will give them pain-free lives, but that He will protect them from succumbing to the evil one. Brothers and sisters we will never live a pain free life as long we are in this world. Look at how life has been for the past two years due to the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic. Look at what is happening now around the world especially the conflict in Israel and Palestine and other parts of the world. Hence the mission of God of bringing love to these affected communities should continue.

3. Verse 17. "Sanctify them in your truth. Your word is the truth."

The Greek word for 'sanctify' is hagiason meaning being set apart as sacred to God. It means to make holy or to consecrate. This means being set apart for God's service. We cannot perform our mission

of witnessing to the love of the Holy Father in this world unless we ourselves are holy. We were set apart at our baptism and God commissioned us to do His work. May the almighty God bless us as we carry this task of evangelizing the world. Amen

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