

Glory in Giving

In the name of him who is even now interceding for us at the right hand of his Father, dear friends in Christ: The title of this message, “Glory in Giving”, may have given you the impression that this is going to be one of those dreaded stewardship sermons designed to guilt you into giving more. If so, allow me to allay your fears. It’s not. However, some form of the two words “glory” and “give” or synonyms for the same appear no less than 18 times in today’s short Gospel reading. It stands to reason that the two concepts are a major theme of what Jesus is saying here, and that they are related somehow. So, let me set this up:

It’s Thursday night of Holy Week. We’re with Jesus and his disciples in the upper room where they have just celebrated the Passover meal together. In the course of this meal, Jesus instituted the Sacrament of Holy Communion, giving to his faithful his body and blood under the elements of bread and wine. This is key because in Jewish time reckoning, the day begins at sundown. So, for them it’s already Friday. And before this Friday ends, Jesus will have given his body and blood on the cross for all people. Indeed, this whole day from beginning to end is about Jesus giving himself.

Jesus knows what’s coming. His disciples, on the other hand, are clueless as usual. Though Jesus has tried to explain what’s about to happen to them numerous times, they just don’t get it. And so, after the meal, he’s taken some time to explain it to them again in very simple terms. To prepare them for what’s about to unfold, he’s told them that he’s going away, specifically that he is going to his Father, and that is for their good. He’s told them that it will be very traumatic for them, that they’ll be filled with grief and sorrow while the world rejoices. But he’s also told them that he’ll be back, and that their great sorrow will be turned into an even greater joy.

Having done all that was possible at that time to explain these things to his disciples, Jesus now addresses his heavenly Father. Our text is the beginning portion of what is called the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus. We know that Jesus was in almost constant conversation with his Father, and that he would often spend hours alone in prayer. But these words, though addressed to his Father, are also spoken aloud for the benefit of the disciples. They get to listen in on the conversation – and this too is part of their preparation for the staggering events that are about to unfold. No, they won’t get all of it now; but afterward they will remember Jesus’ words, and that will help them to understand the how and why of made no sense to them as it occurred.

Jesus begins by lifting up his eyes to heaven. This is his usual posture for prayer – not head down with hands neatly folded, but actually looking up to the One he’s speaking to with his hands extended. Beyond simply being logical to face whom you are speaking to, this signals to the disciples that he is no longer directly talking to them.

“Father, the hour has come”, Jesus says. This is important. Up until now when pressed on certain issues about his identity and mission, he’s repeatedly said, “My hour has not yet arrived.” In other words, “It isn’t time yet.” Ah, but now is the time. *This* is what he came for. While all of his life and ministry have been significant, everything he’s said and done has been leading up to this hour, this hour in which he will give his life in atonement for the sins of the world. This is why the Father sent him: to bear the penalty of all of mankind’s sin in his suffering and dying on the cross.

Jesus knows that the next twenty hours are going to be absolutely horrific for him. He will be bound like a common criminal, roughly handled by guards, mocked, spit upon, falsely accused, repeatedly beaten, wrongly condemned – and that's all before sunrise when things turn from very bad to much worse. Because then he'll stand trial before Pilate who, even without finding him guilty of anything, will order him beaten with rods in an attempt to placate the bloodthirsty crowd. And when that fails to appease them, he'll agree to have Jesus crucified—which means first another whipping, this time with the barbed thin multiple strands of a flagellum, a whip designed to dig deep into the flesh and tear away skin. By nine in the morning, Jesus will be hanging naked from nails driven through his wrists and feet to the cross. And for the next six hours he will be in unthinkable agony struggling for breath. The shame and suffering Jesus knows that he is about to endure surpasses anything we might imagine.

But when praying to his Father, he doesn't speak of it that way. He doesn't pray for the strength to endure it. No, he says, "*Glorify* your Son that the Son may glorify you." He doesn't speak of his passion in terms of shame and suffering; he speaks of it as his glory.

Heads explode. We think of glory in positive and impressive terms. Glory has to do with great achievement and fame and praise and honor and splendor and power and magnificence. Christ's passion is the exact opposite of all of that. It's ugly, brutal, horrendous. It's about weakness. As a matter of fact the word "passion" derives from same the root as "passive". When we speak of Christ's *passion* we don't mean his suffering per se; we mean the things that he allowed to happen to him, things he allowed that could have prevented or stopped if he had wanted to. He is God, after all. When his tormentors were telling him to prove himself by coming down from the cross, he *could* have done it. He could have come down, healed himself, and blown all his enemies to kingdom come in a flash. The point being that it was an act of his will to stay on the cross and to endure every other abuse and torment that were heaped upon him. The entire process involved him giving himself. And that, from the divine perspective, is what true glory is all about.

God's glory is giving. The Father eternally gives himself for the Son. That's what makes him the Father and the Son the Son. Thus the Son is the glory of the Father. The Son in flesh, Jesus, gives himself for humankind, specifically for his Church, the communion of the faithful – or as Jesus says it in the prayer "the people that you [that is the Father] gave me out of the world". Thus we, the church, are the glory of the Son. We owe our existence and our lives to his self giving. And he is glorified when we receive the gifts he continues to give that sustain us in faith unto life eternal.

This, in turn, brings more glory to the Father, as Jesus says to him in the prayer, "I glorified you on earth having accomplished the work that you gave me to do." What was that work? Jesus explains, "I have manifested your name"; that is, he has revealed and made known the true identity of the Father and his loving disposition toward us. Then Jesus says, "I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know the truth that I came from you." So much giving going on: the Father giving to the Son the words of eternal life, the Son giving his disciples those words in his preaching and teaching, the disciples receiving that word and coming to know that the Son is the Father's gift sent to save us by his word – and his self sacrifice, of course.

All to God's glory, his glory in giving. May we therefore glorify him by receiving his word, his body and blood, his Spirit, and his truth. And receiving these gifts, let us also bring glory to God by the giving of ourselves for each other. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!