

In today's reading from Jesus' farewell speech to his disciples we hear Jesus praying from heaven about four of his deepest longings for His Church. His first prayer is for the Holy Spirit to protect us and keep us from all the powers in the world that reject Jesus. His second prayer is that we exhibit the same Oneness with each other that he shares with his Heavenly Parent. Thirdly he prays that we might experience the joy of being a Jesus community of faith. Finally, Jesus prays to God to sanctify the church by creating a Holy people whose purpose it is to become a blessing to all the nations.

John 17:6-19

"I have revealed to you those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours: you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name--the name you gave me--so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to the destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they many have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

"Prayers From Heaven"

According to the gospel writer John, the life story of Jesus was not over until he returned to his Heavenly Parent who had given him birth.

In Christian theology Jesus' return to his Creator is called The Ascension. Now if you come from the Catholic church tradition, as a child you may have first learned about Jesus' ascension by memorizing church doctrine. Remember the part of the Apostle's Creed that goes: *He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father?* If you come from a mainline Protestant tradition you probably have a mental Biblical image of gentle Jesus floating up into heaven waving a final good-bye to all his friends. If you've had a loved one die you've probably experience Jesus' ascension as a spiritual longing for your beloved to be present with you again. And, if a little one has ever asked you this question after the family pet has died: Is Spot in heaven with Jesus? and you've found yourself silently singing the first line of that old gospel tune. . . **Tell me the stories of Jesus, I love to hear Things I would ask him to tell me, if he were here . . .** you just might believe that the One who told you to call him friend because he continues to tell you everything you need to know about God . . . has ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God to give new life to the living and the dead.

Things I would ask him to tell me, if he were here . . . Around 90 A.D. or so when the resurrected Jesus was no longer with them, John's Jesus community of faith became frightened by persecution. When they started falling apart John put Jesus' farewell speech into writing. John's purpose in including those departing words and prayers of Jesus was to comfort, encourage, and re-unite that struggling church through mutual faith in their Lord Jesus Christ. When I first read Jesus' farewell discourse I was a young parent of four. I remember that the part of Jesus' farewell prayer that claimed my attention was his spiritual longing for his children to stay united in their love for another. For me and my brood

this meant doing no harm, not putting each other down, standing up for one another, watching each other's backs, helping each other out, and sharing. This also meant that when I was watching over them I did everything in my power to squash jealousy, selfishness, greed, entitlement, "I'm better than you attitudes," and squealing lies of "Mom's he's punching me," when in fact, he was not. In the nurturing of my brood I did the best I could, and as it turned out, so did they. Now as adults they like each other, keep their competitiveness to a minimum, and help each other out. This gives me great joy---a joy that I would like to have continue. In an effort to help that happen I restated my teachings to them one day when my husband and I sat down to explain our Last Will and Testament to our current larger brood of children. An opportune moment for me to say my final words came right after they had no more jokes to tell about what they would do after Don and I died. In the middle of the lull I said in response to what I had just heard: *"If you fight over any of our things, use your portion selfishly, or try to take more than your share-I will come back and haunt you."*

Things I would ask Him to tell me if he were here . . .

I will always remember the repeated dream that six year old Sarah had for several months before her death. In her dream she was climbing up many stairs to a beautiful palace. It was a delightful journey until she opened the doors into the great hall, saw a magnificent golden throne with a red carpet leading up to it, and got scared . . . because, Sarah explained, *"There was no King sitting in the chair."* Sarah was a spiritual child who received comfort from angels who regularly visited her. But Sarah did not want to go to heaven until someone was sitting in the big chair. A few days before her death her prayer was answered when she opened the door of her dream room and Jesus was there ---sitting on the throne with a crown on his head with his arms outstretched to her.

Things I would ask Him to tell me if he were here . . .

Baptism is a sacrament of the Christian Church. Whenever someone asks me why they should be baptized, the first thing that pops into my

mind is a one frame cartoon in which a doctor and patient are engaged in a diagnostic consultation in the doctor's office. The patient is showing the doctor the weird skin problem that he is having. The problem is that he has those large yellow smiley faces all over his body. In the caption below the picture the doctor is giving the patient his best guess as to the cause: *"You probably came in contact with someone who has an infectious smile"* (Randy Glasbergen, from *Laughter from Heaven*, p. 98). That idea of contact with someone with an infectious smile always triggers in my mind's eye the Biblical story of Jesus' Baptism. Although Jesus never baptized anyone himself the gospels tell about the time that Jesus chose to be baptized by Israel's prophet, John the Baptist. In the church's remembrance of it, when Jesus ascended up from the waters of his Baptism, the Spirit of God descended like a dove and a voice from heaven said; *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."* The church is the infectious community who smiles a lot because we know without a doubt that we belong to God and because we believe that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8).

Things I would ask Him to tell me if he were here . . . Kelly and Christopher, today you are bringing Alexis into this community of faith to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We will grace her with faith's smile that she is a beloved child of God, a mutual friend of Jesus, and a good human being. Alexis Paige Read, today you get your first smiley sticker. Whenever you want another, just have your parents or Kimberly or Edward bring you to church so that you can get lots more.