

THE PRIESTLY PRAYER OF JESUS

Texts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

THE PRAYER OF “THE HOUR OF JESUS”

When “his hour” came, Jesus prayed to the Father (Cf. Jn 17). His prayer, the longest transmitted by the Gospel, embraces the whole economy of creation and salvation, as well as his death and Resurrection. The prayer of the Hour of Jesus always remains his own, just as his Passover “once for all” remains ever present in the liturgy of his Church. (2746)

The prayer of our high priest

Christian Tradition rightly calls this prayer the “priestly” prayer of Jesus. It is the prayer of our high priest, inseparable from his sacrifice, from his passing over (Passover) to the Father to whom he is wholly “consecrated” (Jn 17:11, 13, 19). (2747)

In this Paschal and sacrificial prayer, everything is “recapitulated” (Eph 1:10) in Christ: God and the world; the Word and the flesh; eternal life and time; the love that hands itself over and the sin that betrays it; the disciples present and those who will believe in him by their word; humiliation and glory. It is the prayer of unity. (2748)

Jesus prays for us and in us

Jesus fulfilled the work of the Father completely; his prayer, like his sacrifice, extends until the end of time. The prayer of this hour fills the end-times and carries them toward their consummation. Jesus, the Son to whom the Father has given all things, has given himself wholly back to the Father, yet expresses himself with a sovereign freedom by virtue of the power the Father has given him over all flesh. (Cf. Jn 17:11, 13, 19, 24) The Son, who made himself Servant, is Lord, the *Pantocrator* [*Lord of All Creation*]. Our high priest who prays for us is also the one who prays in us and the God who hears our prayer. (2749)

By entering into the holy name of the Lord Jesus we can accept, from within, the prayer he teaches us: “Our Father!” His priestly prayer fulfils, from within, the great petitions of the Lord’s Prayer: concern for the Father’s name; passionate zeal for his kingdom (glory); the accomplishment of the will of the Father, of his plan of salvation; and deliverance from evil. (Cf. Jn 17:6, 11, 12, 26; 17:1, 5, 10, 24, 23-26. 17:2, 4, 6, 9, 11, 12, 24: 17:15. (2750)

Finally, in this prayer Jesus reveals and gives to us the “knowledge”, inseparably one, of the Father and of the Son, which is the very mystery of the life of prayer. (Cf. Jn 17:3, 6-10, 25) (2751)

THE TEXT OF THE PRIESTLY PRAYER OF JESUS

The Gospel of St John - Chapter 17

Jesus prays to the Father (17:1-5)

Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said:

‘Father, the hour has come:

glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you;

and, through the power over all mankind that you have given him,

let him give eternal life to all those you have entrusted to him.

And eternal life is this:

to know you, the only true God,

and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

I have glorified you on earth

and finished the work that you gave me to do.

Now, Father, it is time for you to glorify me

with that glory I had with you

before ever the world was.

I have made your name known

to the men you took from the world to give me.

They were yours and you gave them to me,

and they have kept your word.

Now at last they know that all you have given me comes indeed from you;

for I have given them the teaching you gave to me,

and they have truly accepted this, that I came from you,

and have believed that it was you who sent me.

I pray for them;

I am not praying for the world but for those you have given me,

because they belong to you:

all I have is yours and all you have is mine,

and in them I am glorified.

I am not in the world any longer,

but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.

Jesus prays for the Apostles, his Priests (17: 6-19)

Holy Father, keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one like us.

While I was with them,
I kept those you had given me true to your name.
I have watched over them and not one is lost
except the one who chose to be lost,
and this was to fulfil the scriptures.

But now I am coming to you
and while still in the world I say these things
to share my joy with them to the full.

I passed your word on to them,
and the world hated them,
because they belong to the world
no more than I belong to the world.

I am not asking you to remove them from the world,
but to protect them from the evil one.

They do not belong to the world
any more than I belong to the world.

Consecrate them in the truth; your word is truth.

As you sent me into the world,
I have sent them into the world,
and for their sake I consecrate myself
so that they too may be consecrated in truth.

Jesus prays for the whole Church (17:20-27)

I pray not only for these,
but for those also who through their words will believe in me.
May they all be one.

Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you,
so that the world may believe it was you who sent me.

I have given them the glory you gave to me,
that they may be one as we are one.

With me in them and you in me,
may they be so completely one
that the world will realise that it was you who sent me
and that I have loved them as much as you loved me.

Father, I want those you have given me
to be with me where I am,
so that they may always see the glory
you have given me because you loved me
before the foundation of the world.

Father, Righteous One, the world has not known you,
but I have known you,

and these have known that you have sent me.

I have made your name known to them
and will continue to make it known,
so that the love with which you loved me may be in them,
and so that I may be in them.'

SOME FURTHER COMMENTS ON THE PRIESTLY PRAYER OF JESUS

In chapter 17 of his Gospel St John presents the Holy Eucharist as the Priestly Prayer of Jesus. Our sharing in the Priestly Prayer of Christ at every Mass should be the living centre of our whole prayer life.

“As our priest, Christ prays for us. As our Head he prays in us.

As our God we pray to Him.” (St Augustine)

Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, St. John does not describe the institution of the Holy Eucharist or the Last Supper as such, even though in the Discourse on the Bread of Life of chapter six he gives us its true meaning. But, at the end of Christ's final message to his Apostles (chapters 13-17) St. John gives us in its place this magnificent Priestly Prayer. He is perhaps giving us another perspective on the Holy Eucharist - that it is to be seen as the Priestly Prayer of Christ *par excellence*. The following comments on chapter 17, which are especially helpful, are taken from Fr. Andre Feuillet's book *The Priesthood of Christ and His Ministers* (Doubleday, 1975):

“The background to this passage is the Jewish Feast of Atonement in which the high priest makes atonement first for himself, then for his house, the Israelite priesthood, and finally for all the chosen people.

“Through the mediation of his favoured apostles (his priests), who are closely united to one another, Jesus will communicate to others (the whole Church) eternal life and the knowledge of the Father and the Son and will form them into a community that is truly one.

“[Jesus prays]: ‘May they all be one, Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you... With me in them and you in me, may they be completely one...’ In the perspective of St John’s Gospel these mutual relations between God and the disciples of Jesus are seen primarily as the great fruit of the Eucharist. Chapter 6 teaches us that the reception of the Eucharist guarantees our communion with Christ, and through him, with the Father: ‘He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him. As I who am sent by the Father myself draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me.’ (6:56-57)

“We are told that the followers of Christ must be one with each other as the Father and the Son are one. This can only mean that the communion of the disciples with one another is preceded and determined by their communion in the divine life, which is itself the fruit of Eucharistic communion (cf. v.21)... It is clear that the great prayer of John 17 has a Eucharistic background”.

IN BRIEF

- **The prayer of the hour of Jesus, rightly called the “priestly prayer” (cf. Jn 17), sums up the whole economy of creation and salvation. It fulfils the great petitions of the Our Father. (2758)**