

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, May 12th 2016

Jesus gave us basically only two prayers. (Recall: “prayer” in the New Testament almost always means petition.) The first is the “Our Father”, which tells us what we should ask God for (“establish your kingdom now”), and the second is Jesus’ own prayer to His Father, which is the subject of today’s Gospel and which tells us pretty clearly what Jesus himself wants for His people. He wants unity – unity between the branches of the Christian church, unity within the branches of the churches, unity within parishes, unity within families. Jesus wants us to be one, as He and the Father are one. Such unity, so hard for us to achieve, is a principal sign of God’s presence. It is, in fact, the one feature of the Christian church that will be sufficiently attractive to outsiders that it will draw them in. By contrast, division and discord drive people away. Division and discord surely do not manifest Christ’s presence.

Remember: unity does not mean uniformity. We can and should differ. None of us is wise enough or knowledgeable enough to have the whole truth. Differences allow us go get a more complete grasp on the complexities of life and church. Unity means we respect one another’s understanding, views, and priorities.

It’s hard to attach too much importance to this mark of the divine. The division of the Christian churches – to take only the largest manifestation of our “not-oneness” – is a literal scandal. Though individually we didn’t create it, still we tolerate it and thereby are responsible for its continued presence. It is, in a sense, like racial prejudice or any of the other “-isms” that divide us. It’s everyone’s job to stop it.

For starters we have to get out of the “us-and-them” mentality, particularly the “we’re right and they’re wrong” mindset. We have to seek ways of working together across confessional lines. We need to take every opportunity to worship together. Within the larger Christian community we’re all brothers and sisters, of Jesus and of one another. That’s because we’ve all been baptized, and by our baptisms we are missioned – commissioned – to be Christ for our world – “them” as well as “us”.

That means not just following a set of rules (the Pharisees did that), but literally working to save our world which, at the creation, God had found good. “Saving” our world means not just conservation of the planet but application of systems of government and economics that are inclusive and promote the common good. And in this effort we have to recognize that, ultimately, doing this is God’s work, not ours. We can’t do it by ourselves. But we can block it. Now there’s a frightening thought.

As a perhaps surprising manifestation of the divine unity, It’s helpful to realize that the two prayers of Jesus (ours and His) blend into one (and their petitions answered), for when at last we are truly one, then God’s kingdom, God’s rule, will have been established in our world.

This is Dr. Heaney's last reflection for us. He has been a faithful reflection writer since the beginning of this ministry. In addition to the tremendous contribution he has made to Creighton University, to the research into osteoporosis, to the faith community at St. John's, Bob has brought many graces for thousands around the world through his reflections. Thanks you, Bob!

Robert Heaney-Creighton University's John A. Chair