

Easter 7 – May 13, 2018
Text: John 17:11b-19
Theme: "Friends in High Places"

Sometimes life is hard. Maybe it's our own fault and maybe it is no fault of our own but the cause of the difficulty does not change the fact of the difficulty. Nor can hardships be compared. My hardships may seem inconsequential to you but then yours may seem inconsequential to me. For instance, I know from my experience of being a student for more than half my life that a difficult relationship with a teacher will always pass one way or another; and sometimes, that difficult teacher ends up being a favorite teacher. But at the time, when one is sitting in class feeling unfairly criticized or unfairly graded, it is hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Likewise, when I sit and talk with our oldest members, I hear them laugh very dismissively about things in their lives that they thought were horrible at the time. Sometimes I can barely believe that they can laugh about such awful challenges, but time has given them a perspective that cannot be achieved any other way than the passing of time. So we learn that all difficulties fade as we progress through life but at the time we are enduring them, it is hard to see past them. That is when Jesus' high priestly prayer becomes important for me.

In the Gospel of John, chapter 17, we have the privilege of eaves dropping on Jesus talking to our Father. Like little kids hiding behind the couch and listening to our parents talk, we hear Jesus pour out his soul to our Father just before he is to face crucifixion. Maybe you remember eavesdropping on your parents growing up. Of course I never did such a horrid thing, but my sister tells me this. One listens with a mixture of tremendous curiosity and horrendous dread. On the one hand, you want to know what is going to happen. On the other hand, one is very frightened of hearing what will happen.

The nice thing about eavesdropping on Jesus and the Father is that they intend for us to hear them and it is all for our comfort. In that prayer he says some of the most important words we need to hear. First, he prays for us. Jesus, the Son of the Most High God, prays for us. He specifically asks our Father to keep us in his name. What does that mean for us?

Well, first of all remember that any prayer Jesus prays is answered with a resounding yes since whatever he asks is holy, righteous and perfect. We sometimes don't know how our prayers will be answered because sometimes our prayers are short sighted and weighed down by whatever thing is weighing us down at the moment. We pray for silly things, like winning the lottery. Does it

ever occur to you to pray for the ability to manage well all that God has given you? You know that God rewards good management? Praying to win the lottery is a silly prayer. I don't know what any of you give, but I would stake my reputation on this. The wealthiest among you give the most and play the lottery the least. There is a direct correlation to high tithing and high income because that's good management, and God does not need the State of Illinois to help him reward good managers.

Jesus' prayers are never silly. Because Jesus is fully God as well as fully human, his will and the will of our Father are the same, and we know that his will is always done. So Jesus' prayers are always answered with a resounding, YES!

Second, remember what it means to be in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus asks his Father to keep us in His name, this is no small thing to do. Jesus says,

"And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one."

We were given the privilege of being placed in the Name of God at our Baptisms. We are brought into that family and given that

name by adoption. But we can always reject that adoption. At any moment, we have the power to reject God and go our own way. We can do that little by little with persistent sin until we kill our faith or we can do that all at once by choosing an idol of some kind instead of God. Jesus prays here that we will be kept in that name. That is that the Almighty God will strive, using his power through the Word and the Holy Sacrament, to keep our faith vibrant and strong and to keep us as part of the family no matter how much we sin, no matter how often we wander off, no matter. We know that the Father will go to any lengths to fulfill his son's prayer. He will do everything possible to keep us in the family. Of course, you and I have the final word. God will not drag us into Heaven by our hair, kicking and screaming, but once we are in the family, we must make a concerted effort to get out. So never lose hope when there are people you love who are flirting with disaster. Remember that God is working harder than you are to keep their faith alive!

Third, we can be certain that we are never on our own during the hardships, trials and difficulties of life. I have heard many people say to me that they just hope they have the faith to get through this. What a nonsense statement that is. If you have said something like that, shame on you. You know better than that. Of course you have strong enough faith to get through "this." I don't

care what the "this" is, I can guaranty you that you have the faith to get through it. I know you have enough faith because Jesus has asked the Father to keep you in his name. That's that. Done and done. Whatever we have to endure on our path, we will be kept in his name. We are guaranteed the faith to get through it. In fact, the concept of "losing faith" is a misnomer. You can't really lose faith like you lose your keys. The only way we lose faith is if we throw faith out or reject God long enough for our faith to die. And if you are concerned that your faith might be dead, it isn't! If your faith is dead you won't care because you no longer believe in God. God can be rejected but he will never leave. And if you care about your faith, you have not rejected him.

Jesus went on after that prayer to die on the cross for our sins and to be resurrected from the dead to prove that his sacrifice was sufficient and that we too would be raised from the dead. He proved that he was who he said he was by mastering death and coming back from it and then bodily ascending into heaven. Now that means, we have a friend in high places. We have the Lord of Life not only watching over us and strengthening us when we need help, but he is literally keeping us in his name and protecting us from all the attacks of the evil one. In all honesty, we've got it made.