

## Thought for the Day John 17: 20-26

As we reach this part of the gospel according to John, Jesus has taken his last meal with the disciples, he has washed their feet, answered so many questions and explained so many things, and now he prays.

It's important to note the different context of John's account to those of Matthew, Mark and Luke. In the synoptic gospels Jesus prays alone in the garden of Gethsemane and not only do the disciples not listen to him, they fall asleep, leaving him feeling really on his own. In John they haven't set out for the garden as yet and the disciples are within earshot of Jesus. Jesus has spent time giving instructions to them, now he offers prayer *for* them.

I wonder if you have experienced someone praying for you and doing so aloud. If you have, try remembering how that made you feel. Did you feel comforted, vulnerable, grateful, honoured, humbled, awkward but appreciative, did it feel like someone really cares? It is an honour and privilege to have someone pray aloud for you. Something I experience regularly. Being subject to someone else's prayer is humbling. You are not in control, the person praying is doing the asking. It is not for you to respond, it is God who answers.

Jesus looks up to heaven and prays. He is not teaching the disciples, or exhorting them or the church. There is no call to action, he is simply praying for them. It would perhaps be easier to understand if there were exhortations or teachings directing the disciples and through them directing us. We would, perhaps, then know what to do not to disappoint Jesus.

Instead we overhear a prayer between the Father and the Son about us. It is a time for us to wonder about them discussing us and our community of faith. Jesus prays on behalf of the community of believers, and for those who don't yet know him. For those whose lives will be touched by the disciples. For those whose lives we touch. Jesus doesn't just care for the "in crowd" he prays for the world. John often uses the world to mean those who don't believe, or those who oppose Jesus.

The central message of this prayer is unity. We must be 'one holy and universal', founded on the teaching of the followers. These teachings have been passed down generation to generation. Jesus longs for us to be one, to be united. This unity is not a contract signed for outward

purposes. It's not about agreeing to join ecumenically every fifth Sunday, it's much deeper than that. It's based on, and must mirror the unity between the Father and the Son. Father, Son and Holy Spirit three in one, the Trinity. We too must become more Trinitarian. We must be united. Jesus doesn't allow us to miss the point as he spells out what that means. The theologian Tom Wright explains, "...the result of this unity will be that the world will see, and know, that this human community, united across all traditional barriers of race, custom, gender or class, can only come from the action of the creator God. 'So that the world may believe...'"

Jesus again picks up the earlier messages of love. People will know we are followers of Christ if we love one another. Unity is vital. Sometimes we can encounter this unity when we meet Christians from totally different backgrounds and spirituality. Despite our many differences and different expressions of our faith, those traditions that perhaps keep us apart; that unity of love and devotion can break though and cannot be severed. We are, as the hymn says bound together, "...with chords that cannot be broken". Sadly, all too often we are reminded that Jesus' prayer for us hasn't yet been fully answered.

Unity cannot be forced. We can't be coerced into it. But in our broken world where divisions have been drawn along religious lines for centuries there is no excuse for us as Christians not to actively work towards that unity Jesus prayed for; to be one in faith. If we are one in faith then we can strive to be one in our lives and in our worship. And by doing so we can enter into the Trinity, that unity of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.