Prayers of Jesus

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SévÎntð tim ëf cha tch Òtn Ðh Êt; Òntg Ðk Ñù Òntt Ëm Ëmn ÓtâÊtm Ënh Ònt Ït Ëm Ëmn Ònt.

Sunday Readings for June 1, 2014 for Cycle A:
Acts 1:12-14; Ps 27; 1 Pt 4:13-16; Jn 17:1-11

PRAYERS OF JESUS

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How would I describe the Church to a person unfamiliar with our faith? Unfortunately, English uses the same term to designate the building (Kyriakon, the Lord's house) and the community of believers (ekklesia, those called out of darkness into light, from death to life). So first, one would emphasize that the edifice we call "church" is at the service of the people in the community. Then, because the Church is often known superficially by its institutions of healing and learning, one would show that all such activities should flow from a deep life of prayer. The work of the Church continues the healing and teaching ministry of Jesus, whose life was grounded in prayer. He followed the age-old patterns of Temple and synagogue worship that constitute the foundation for our liturgical calendar. He prayed with his followers, especially at meals, and recited Israel's prayer of faith. "Listen, O Israel" (Dt 6:4-9 being its core) in the evening and morning. He used the tefillin (phylacteries) and the fringes on his garment (Mt 9:20) as evidence that he practiced the commandments. Moreover, he often spent the entire night in intimate communion with the heavenly Father.

The first disciples had learned the lesson well! St. Luke tells us that, after the Lord's ascension to the heavenly Father, "they returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the Temple praising God" (24:53). They also prayed together in their temporary home in Jerusalem, undoubtedly guided into unity of devotion by the quiet presence of Mary. Who would know better how to prepare for the coming of the Holy Spirit?

We might wish that the Gospels would provide more details about the way Jesus prayed, the words he used... In fact, much can be learned from the hints given by the evangelists. All we need to do is to study the Jewish practices of that time! And we do have the same Psalter that Jesus prayed and quoted, from his temptation in the desert to his death on the cross. In his account of the Last Supper, St. John gives us what must be a synthesis of Jesus' method of melding the various aspects of prayer into a unity. The first part of that text, called "the prayer of Jesus the high priest," forms the Sunday Gospel during the Church's preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

By looking at our traditional prayers it would be easy to surmise that "glory" is an important concept in liturgy and personal prayer. The statement "Your glory fills all heaven and earth" in the Sanctus (see Is 6:3) makes us realize that glory means first the impressive presence of God that permeates all creation. For the person alert to the mystery of the blessed One, every creature reflects some facet of the divine. Our response should be an acknowledgment of this fact, both in "giving glory" to God (not considering the creature itself to be divine) and in treating all creatures with reverence. If all human beings gave glory to God, all living with this sensitivity to the inherent value of each human person and all other creatures, then peace would indeed come on earth.
The paradoxes of Christianity are rooted in the truth that Jesus, in his humiliations, agony and death, gave glory to his Father and manifested the mystery of God's life and glorious power to the world. The human spirit should never be crushed, even by the most brutal abuses of cruelty and fanaticism, as long as each person completes the work of God. Thus Jesus could state: "I have given you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do" (Jn 17:4). Of course, faith is essential because results may not be evident, at least immediately. How many have suffered under the tyrannies of the past century! Millions of lives were cut short, but these martyrs completed their work of fidelity. May the work of those who in recent decades have found freedom in Eastern Europe be worthy of their witness! What are we doing to help them?

The prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper embraces all generations of his disciples, to whom he entrusted his teaching, the message of his Father. "It is in them that I have been glorified" (Jn 17:10). One of the many reasons that we come together in the Sunday liturgy is to glorify God through the work of Jesus in his Spirit. In such intimacy we will find strength to complete our work of service and of self-giving. This should be our response to the gift of eternal life.