

**May 24, 2020 – Graduating Seniors**

**Given by Deacon Ruth Ann Hoy**

John 17:1-11

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, **2** since you have given him authority over all people,[a] to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. **3** And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. **4** I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. **5** So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

**6** “I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. **7** Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; **8** for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. **9** I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. **10** All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. **11** And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

“Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.”

In this passage from today’s Gospel, Jesus is taking leave of His disciples and rejoining God in heaven. This is a bittersweet moment of leave-taking mixed in with the joy of reunion.

Nowadays, the next two months have typically been filled with bittersweet moments as our children and grandchildren receive their diplomas and take the next step in their life journeys. Time that has always been spent with family and friends, for ceremonies, parties and making memories. So, I can’t help feeling terribly sad for these students who have worked so hard to finish their degree coursework and were slated for graduation exercises. The graduation ceremony is a watershed or milestone in each student’s life, whether it is from kindergarten, grammar school, middle school, high school, or for an Associate’s, Bachelor’s, Master’s or PhD.

And how about the students whose work earned them the honor to speak as the Valedictorian for their class? Robbed, I say, just plain robbed - and by a virus that no one here took seriously until it spread to the United States and then into our state. Until people were not only hospitalized for it and in too many cases, died from it.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus prays for His disciples as He prepares for leaving them. He asks God to watch over them, continue to guide them and comfort them.

It occurred to me the other day, that the disciples were the first confirmands. No, they didn’t formally meet with Jesus and our pastor on a given day for a scheduled time period. They didn’t have the benefit of Luther’s catechism to wade through all of the lessons Jesus taught them. They didn’t have to give a mini-sermon to the congregation and receive a certificate on Reformation Sunday, verifying their membership in the Lutheran church.

But, they received something even better - they literally heard it from the horse’s mouth! They spent countless days absorbing His teachings and learning to live as children of God. They personally witnessed miracles and saw how Jesus changed His followers’ lives.

When Jesus left them to return to heaven, He left behind something more precious than gold - He left the disciples with His love. We celebrate with our graduates, knowing that they too have been gifted this love. They have been blessed with the trifacta of love that is the Father, Son and Holy Ghost who have wrapped their loving arms around all of us.

Yes, things are a bit dicey these days with the pandemic and searching for our “new normal”. We need to remember Martin Luther’s assurance, found in the Book of Concord, that God may let bad things happen but He only allows them to continue for a designated length of time, I believe, as a teaching moment. Apparently, the 40 days on the ark, in the desert or during Lent were not enough time for us to learn the lesson this time, so we now need to have patience. As one of my sisters remarked when the “safer at home” orders were instituted, it is as if God hit a reset button to help us reevaluate our lives and appreciate not only our families and friends but our freedoms as well.

In closing, I would like to paraphrase one of the passages from today’s scripture reading taken from I Peter: “Resist [Satan and stay] steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.