

* While the event of Christ's resurrection was accompanied with joy and assurance, the next significant occurrence, Christ's Ascension, turned into the nostalgic expectation of the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit; His coming would enable the disciples to carry out the Great Commission and be protected. According to the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit descended on the 50th day after Passover upon the disciples and hundreds of others who responded to the apostolic proclamation. But to make this great project the 'real jam' Jesus had interceded for the disciples before his act of redemption. In the High Priestly Prayer here in John 17, the gospel reading for today, Jesus demonstrates his deep concern and passion. The history of Christianity for 2000 years after Christ, witnesses that Jesus' prayer took effect in the bringing of Pentecost for many including us; The Father thereby fulfilled his Son's petitions! Having been consecrated for Christ and his Church, we continue to carry out one's own mission in unity with the whole Church in Christ with assistance and protection of the Holy Spirit. Glory to you, O Christ.

* We pray. Dear Heavenly Father thank you ever so much for Jesus' intercession that has taken effect in the apostles as well as in us, your disciples. According to your will we were renewed in love and the Spirit and now stir our hearts to live in purity and unity as our Lord wants us to be. Let your will be accomplished in us in virtue of Christ's redeeming act on the cross. To Him alone belongs all glory, dominion and worship, to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

* It would be easier for a preacher to concentrate on a single text, for instance the gospel's reading, but I found that the three lessons for today are worthy to be preached as three have a common ground. It helps to understand Jesus' concern and passion as he mediates day and night between us and the Father Almighty, maker of the heavens and the earth.

* Now let's discuss the lesson. In the first lesson from (Acts 1:15-26) we've read that in order to preserve the hidden significance of the number twelve as the foremost matter of importance the apostles had the voter's meeting. The procedure of the election was much the same as in our voting meetings. To fill a vacancy that resulted because of Judas' apostasy, the eleventh remaining Apostles appointed two candidates, Barsabbas and Matthias. For this occasion they said a prayer, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these

two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place,” (v.25). After prayer they elected Matthias by the casting of ballots.

* The second reading doesn't say anything about prayer or Judas; it focuses on God as the Master and source of love and it focuses on our vocation as well. The disciples should be conformed in that love in order to be confident on the Day of Judgment. Aha, that is a case! The judgment! Isn't it a common ground for both readings? Now, the important premise follows. Listen! Unlike the accomplished judgment over Judas, the eschatological judgment in the Last Day is still in the air. Have you ever imagined that Judas' destruction is the Eschatological Judgment in miniature? I've never. Moreover, Judas serves as a prototype for the people who have not responded adequately to God's love in Christ Jesus. Have you heard about that? I've not. By the way, those not responding will share company with Judas in eternity. Doesn't this fact alarm us? Yes, It does me.

* The third reading from John's Gospel, called the Priestly Prayer, is the basic one. The impression we might have after hearing this, is that there is no anxiety about Jesus' own outcome. Contrary to that, there is anxiety for his disciples. Jesus spoke this prayer soon before Judas coming with the executioners. Judas had already betrayed his Master. That's why Jesus prayed in such a way, "While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled," (v.12). So the common ground for these readings is found. It's the judgment upon the people in whom God's Love, Agapao, couldn't bring forth a fruit.

* From this point we can understand better and better that special concern and that passion Jesus revealed in prayer speaking on behalf of the disciples particularly and soon after bearing the cross on behalf of the entire world. Next to that we understood the importance of Jesus' ascension to the Father. And finally we understood to what extent of importance we should take the commandment, " ...Whoever loves God must also love his brother," (1 John 4 :21).

* As far as the judgment was mentioned, we should say some truth about the Judge. The Scriptures draw two images - the God of justice; and, God of mercy. The God's justice leads a sinner to repentance and the God's mercy leads a sinner to love Jesus Christ. (Joe 2:13) says, "Let your hearts be broken, and not your clothing, and come back to the Lord your God: for he is full of grace and pity, slow to be angry and great in mercy, ready

to be turned from his purpose of punishment.” Now hear the truth. Though the Lord is compassionate and merciful, however, his compassion does not extend beyond the human life. This is the imagery of God’s justice and mercy.

* Friends, reflecting on this truth, I imagine with a new parable based upon the well-known parable, *The rich man and Lazarus*. Here is the parable, " Once upon a time a self-minded sinner died and was carried by the demons to hell. And in hell, as he was in torment, he glanced up for help and saw Abraham far off with many at his side. So he called out ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, let me go back in a moment so that I can repent. But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your earthly life you pleased yourself as gentiles do and you pleased your relatives as gentiles do; so “what reward do you have if you love those who love you? Accordingly, because of God’s justice a great chasm has been fixed between us. It is good and right to set a wall between us so that you cannot return, repent and be saved; your favorable time is over!” This parable might alarm us if we continue our pilgrimage without fear of God and without love of God.

* We pray, “Let the love of Jesus be accomplished in us with bearing forth a fruit of patience, mercy, forgiveness and purity. Dear Jesus, thanks for the Pentecostal season of a gracious welcome and acceptance and for your willingness to hear and give a hand. Amen.

* Now listen to the new imagery; but it’s not a parable. It is based on a real story from a generation before us. Imagine our planet as the huge ship Titanic that is being sailed into the round voyage through cold breathless space and we are the passengers of that round shaped Titanic. 97 years in the past, when the British superliner Titanic set off to the US, nobody thought that the largest, finest and the safest ship would suddenly sink after striking an iceberg in the North Atlantic. During the night, before that tragedy, there were parties everywhere. People were celebrating their birthdays, anniversaries, lucky affairs or just enjoying life in general. But a disaster came in the night; in the midst of universal carelessness and fun. Suddenly, the machine giant bumped into the huge crest of the icy rock. I read that after the collision the cruise band stopped to play blues and jazz. The buzz sound produced by two huge bodies turned into the total silent for a moment. When a bandmaster grasped the situation he ordered his orchestra to play “Nearer My God To Thee.” Soon after the cry for help was heard everywhere but the stricken weren’t helped. 1,517 passengers died on that cruise. Among the

perished were the well-known and unknown, rich and poor, gifted and common. Among the perished were heroes who immediately cared for the children and their moms, with many died in panic, terrified by fear and deep cold waters. Yet not all died, 711 were helped.

* Friends, I recall the Titanic's tragedy as an illustrative emphatic supplement to my parable. From some people in Russia I heard the slogan, "there is enough time for self-love now and for self-giving love at the end." They had decided to repent and follow Jesus sometime in their elderly years. But people cannot cheat God. The Word says, "For man does not know his time. Like fish that are taken in an evil net, and like birds that are caught in a snare, so the children of man are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them," (Ecc 9:12). When the end of times come are kept in a secret from us. That is why we shouldn't forget the parable and the Titanic's lessons.

* Dear Friends, because we are weakened by sinful flesh and each of us are careless in our own degree, we can not satisfy God's holiness; we need the Saviour. Thank God that crying "Jesus, Lord, we are perishing!" rang out, 2000 years ago from the cross, when we were not yet born. That cry for help was converted to another, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Be sure, that petition from our Lord was sounding out with deep concern and passion. The Heavens and universe heard Him, and then the Heavens were opened. It happened on the 50th day after Easter, on that particular day the benefits of Christ's punishment for the sins of the world became ours through the faith in Christ Jesus. Thank Jesus forever for his deep concern and passion; not only by words but by the very act, for you and for me. Beloved, if we decide to live each coming day as it would be the last in our life pleasing the Father, we would be helped without measure. God in Christ Jesus is so powerful and so abundant in mercy if we also respond to his love with deep concern and passion. So let's love not only by words of our mouth but acts as well. Beloved, the peace of the Lord be with you always.

Amen.