

Homily for 7th Sunday of Easter, Year A
By Fr. Jerome Ituah, OCD
Readings: Acts 1:12-14; Ps 26(27); 1 Pet 4:13-16; Jn 17:1-11
Theme: Jesus Prays for Us!

After the Ascension of Christ into heaven, the disciples returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. They went to the upper room where they had been staying. Luke, the author of Acts, lists those in the upper room as the eleven apostles together with the women, Mary, the mother of Jesus and his brothers. The women here may refer to the same women who had always been associated with Jesus and his disciples (cf. Lk 8:2-3) and those at the foot of the cross (cf. Mk 15:40-41). The mention of women reflects the theological emphasis that everyone was important as disciples of Jesus, where there are no more distinctions between Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, men and women. All are included in the mission of Jesus. They, too, received the Holy Spirit together with the apostles. But Mary, the mother of Jesus, is singled out as a remarkable woman on the list. It shows the importance and role of Mary among the apostles. Jesus had given her to John as a mother and, by extension, to be the mother of all the apostles and disciples (cf. Jn 19:26-27). She continued to play that motherly role until she was taken into heaven. There is also the mention of Jesus' brothers. *Adelphoi*, in Greek, could refer to brothers or brothers and sisters. Since there was no single word to refer to cousins and close relatives, as we do today, we must understand *adelphoi* as referring to the relatives of Jesus. If they were the blood brothers of Jesus, the author could have indeed said, and Mary's other children.

They were in one accord, devoting themselves continually to prayer together with the apostles. The Greek participle *proskarterountes* from the verb *prokartereo* used in the context means that they persisted, continued or adhered firmly in prayer. It was what they always did. Our prayer must be consistent, not only in good times or when we need something from God. Our gospel reading comes from what is generally called 'the high-priestly prayer of Jesus.' It is a long prayer, and our reading focuses only on the first part of this prayer. In this prayer, Jesus prays specifically for his disciples. We can identify different aspects of this prayer in our reading today. First, the prayer is made by Jesus to His Father. Jesus teaches us that all our prayers must be directed to the Father. Still, he is the mediator through whom we have access to the Father. Hence, he prays for his disciples as the ideal high priest whose role is to mediate, intercede and offer sacrifices on behalf of the people. Second, Jesus tells us the reason why he is making the prayer. The hour has come. The hour in the gospel of John is the moment of glorification, the moment of the crucifixion and death of Jesus on the cross. That is the very moment that Jesus glorified his Father, and his Father glorified him. By coming into the world, carrying out his mission and dying on the cross, Jesus fulfilled the wish of his Father and the Father, in turn, glorified Jesus by raising him from the dead.

Third, through Jesus, his Father must now give eternal life to his disciples. God the Father had given all authority over the whole world to Jesus. Jesus Christ reclaims what Adam and Eve lost through the fall through his death and resurrection so humanity can have authority over that ancient serpent again. To possess eternal life, the disciples of Jesus must know the only true God and his Son, Jesus Christ, revealed in the flesh. Through his ministry, Jesus manifested and revealed God, his Father, in a unique way to his disciples. Jesus chose them because God had given them to Him. If you remember, before choosing the disciples, Jesus prayed the whole night, communing with his Father (Lk 6:12-13). Hence, he says that his Father gave them to him. He did nothing without the consent and direction of his Father. Jesus then confirmed that the disciples had known, imbibed his words and kept them. At the centre of Jesus' revelation to them was his divinity, that he came from God. The disciples believed

the truth that, indeed, Jesus is the Son of God. Peter confessed that truth when Jesus asked them who he was (cf. Matt 16:16).

Fourth, Jesus prays for the disciples, not for the world. He makes a distinction between his followers and the world. Jesus prays to his Father to protect his disciples from the evil one, Satan and the world. The disciples are uniquely dear to Jesus because the Father had given them to him to support his mission. He prays that none of them would be lost. Finally, he prays for them because he will leave them in the world and return to his Father. The prayer of Jesus extends to all of us, his disciples today. Jesus does not want to lose any of us because he loves us as his disciples.