

Note: In Rome and many other places, the Ascension of the Lord is celebrated on Thursday, rather than Sunday. That is why this Sunday Echo has a different Gospel reading to what you would have heard during our most recent Sunday Mass.

GOSPEL

John 17:20-26

Lifting up his eyes to heaven, Jesus prayed saying:

"Holy Father, I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me. Father, they are your gift to me. I wish that where I am they also may be with me, that they may see my glory that you gave me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father, the world also does not know you, but I know you, and they know that you sent me. I made known to them your name and I will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them."

HOMILY OF POPE LEO XIV

1 June 2025 (Excerpt)

The Gospel we have just heard shows us Jesus, at the Last Supper, praying on our behalf (cf. Jn 17:20). The Word of God, made man, as he nears the end of his earthly life, thinks of us, his brothers and sisters, and becomes a blessing, a prayer of petition and praise to the Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit. As we ourselves, full of wonder

and trust, enter into Jesus' prayer, we become, thanks to his love, part of a great plan that concerns all of humanity.

Christ prays that we may "all be one" (v. 21). This is the greatest good that we can desire, for this universal union brings about among his creatures the eternal communion of love that is God himself: the Father who gives life, the Son who receives it and the Spirit who shares it.

The Lord does not want us, in this unity, to be a nameless and faceless crowd. He wants us to be one: "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us" (v. 21). The unity for which Jesus prays is thus a communion grounded in the same love with which God loves, which brings life and salvation into the world. As such, it is firstly a gift that Jesus comes to bring. From his human heart, the Son of God prays to the Father in these words: "I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (v. 23).

Let us listen with amazement to these words. Jesus is telling us that God loves us as he loves himself. The Father does not love us any less than he loves his only-begotten Son. In other words, with an infinite love. God does not love less, because he loves first, from the very beginning! Christ himself bears witness to this when he says to the Father: "You loved me before the foundation of the world" (v. 24). And so it is: in his mercy, God has always desired to draw all people to himself. It is his life, bestowed upon us in Christ, that makes us one, uniting us with one another.

Dear friends, we received life before we ever desired it. As Pope Francis said: "all of us are sons and daughters, but none of us chose to be born" (Angelus, 1 January 2025). Not only that. As soon as we were born, we needed others in order to live; left to ourselves, we would not have survived. Someone else saved us by caring for us in body and spirit. All of us are alive today thanks to a relationship, a free and freeing relationship of human kindness and mutual care.

That human kindness is sometimes betrayed. As for example, whenever freedom is invoked not to give life, but to take it away, not to help, but to hurt. Yet even in the face of the evil that opposes and takes life, Jesus continues to pray to the Father for us. His prayer acts as a balm for our wounds; it speaks to us of forgiveness and reconciliation. That prayer makes fully meaningful our experience of love for one another as parents, grandparents, sons and daughters. That is what we want to proclaim to the world: we are here in order to be “one” as the Lord wants us to be “one,” in our families and in those places where we live, work and study. Different, yet one; many, yet one; always, in every situation and at every stage of life.

Dear friends, if we love one another in this way, grounded in Christ, who is “the Alpha and the Omega,” “the beginning and the end” (cf. Rev 22:13), we will be a sign of peace for everyone, in society and the world. Let us not forget: families are the cradle of the future of humanity.

Let me add one last thing. The prayer of the Son of God, which gives us hope on our journey, also reminds us that one day we will all be *uno unum* (cf. Saint Augustine, Sermo super Ps. 127): one in the one Saviour, embraced by the eternal love of God. Not only us, but also our fathers, mothers, grandmothers, grandfathers, brothers, sisters and children who have already gone before us into the light of his eternal Pasch, and whose presence we feel here, together with us, in this moment of celebration.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/Homily?



Head: What does it mean to you that the Father loves us with the “same love” with which he loves the Son? What does that love look like?



Heart: Have you experience feeling nameless and faceless in a crowd? What insights might that give you about how a stranger might feel in your parish?



Hands: What can we do to grow in unity in our community or even this Faith Circle small-group? How might we love with the “same love” of God?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the ‘Glory Be’.