

Connecting with the Sunday Readings

**Seventh Sunday of
Easter**

Gospel Word
John 17:20–26

Today's Gospel reading is often used as a mission statement supporting the ecumenical movement. Many church leaders of all denominations are saddened by the historical splits between the various Christian churches. Recent popes have worked to diminish or even end these separations. We all need to continue to pray and work for the unity of all Christians. But there are other applications of Jesus' prayer for oneness.

For Americans the call to oneness is particularly challenging. We are raised on a steady diet of individualism right from the womb. There are some exceptions to this and blessed are those for whom "do it alone" is not the first commandment. Jesus wants to connect us to each other, to himself and to God. Once we are connected, it is like being connected to an electric current, we can light up the world. And just like an electrical system, if we disconnect, nothing can happen. So the clue to understanding this part of the Gospel is to examine the flow of life and energy in the communities we are a part of—family, school, friends, church, and work.

In most of these communities, unity is achieved one small move at a time. Greater unity comes through talking more with each other, listening more carefully and responding more honestly. It comes from being generous and sharing our gifts and talents with one another. We all can grow in this. Our neighborhoods can become more united by getting to know our neighbors and looking for opportunities to help each other. The same can be said of our parishes. Parish unity comes about one gesture at a time. We are called together to worship God not as a gathering of individuals but as a community. How do we show that? This week look for opportunities to create greater oneness in all the facets of your life.

There is also a message here of trusting in God's power to do what God intends us to do. We don't have to do anything "all by ourselves." One of the best settings for such cooperation and connectedness is family life. Some say that families are disintegrating in our contemporary world. Surely some are, but there's also a kind of revolution going on where many families are more united than ever. They connect with each other both in old-fashioned ways like working and playing together or by new ways of communication. That is the message of today's Gospel: that we all be one.

Living the Word

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus concludes the Last Supper with a long prayer. Sometimes it is referred to as his last will and testament. So what was he leaving us? He was leaving us a message of love and a call for unity. Put simply, he is praying that we will know we are loved, that he wishes us to be united with him and the Father, and he wants us to be united to one another in that love. What will that love and unity do? It will make us capable of carrying out his mission of calling people to love, and oneness with God. Love of and union with God is powerful. It will change not just individuals but the world. Some complain that to reduce the Christian faith to the reality of love is a diminishment of the message of Jesus and the life that Jesus wants of us. They see it as a "watering down" of the Gospel. There is some truth to their complaints, if all we preach is "touchy feely" love. However, this is not the kind of love that Jesus is proclaiming. It is about willingness, and decisions, and action. Love covers a multitude of other matters. Love entails responsibility and unity. Acting out of love in difficult circumstances can be the hardest thing we ever do.

One-line Prayer

Father of us all, help us to be more closely connected with each other as you are to us. Amen.