

Glory

The Seventh Sunday of Easter

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Church of the Ascension, Chicago

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Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. 1 Peter 4:12-14

Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. "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. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 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. 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. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 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. " John 17:1-11

I'm wondering how many of us may have used the word 'glory' in conversation with others during the past week. My guess is, not that many, maybe none of us. And I'm wondering this morning why glory seems to have become so divorced from our language, and perhaps our lives, apart from our worship.

Consider the fact that in most of our eucharistic gatherings throughout the year, we start our worship with an ancient hymn, the *Gloria*: 'Glory be to God on high ...' or 'Glory to God in the highest ...' And I wonder if you'd be surprised for me to point out that we have heard the word glory, or its derivatives, eight times in this morning's appointed readings.

The author of the First Letter of Peter was addressing diverse communities of followers of Jesus on whom the world's sorrows were crashing down. Many were being persecuted and some dying for their faith. These downtrodden, fearful believers would have read, as you and I also heard this morning, that '*the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.*'

Six instances of the word glory, or glorify, or glorified, are used by Jesus in today's gospel text. Here, we are listening in as Jesus prays to his heavenly Father on the night before he died for us. Today's gospel is only the first eleven verses of twenty-six, known as the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus and encompassing all of Chapter 17 in John's gospel. As his earthly work nears completion with his Passion and death, Jesus distills, affirms and invokes a divine and eternal perspective with regard to his own divine and eternal nature ... and ours.

This High Priestly Prayer concludes a lengthy final teaching of Jesus known as the Farewell Discourse. It began way back in Chapter 13, and it began with the theme of glory. "... Jesus said, Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once." (Jn. 13:31b-32)

I'm guessing from all of this that we Christians may be missing out if we don't have a living, working knowledge of glory. Various translators tell us that *dōxa* (δόξα), the Greek word translated as glory ... well, the translators are right in defining its New Testament use as *splendour, magnificence, excellence, preeminence, royal majesty, brightness, exaltation* and even 'the glorious condition of blessedness' promised to Christians. And *dōxazo* (δοξάζω), the verb, to glorify: to *praise, celebrate, exalt, and clothe with splendor*.

These all seem to reasonably and rightly point to glory as Jesus and the New Testament authors intend it. And yet I'm thinking of a good and wise and faithful friend, of Brooke's and of mine, who sometimes relates extraordinary and holy moments and then will exclaim, "*It was beyond the beyond!*" Interestingly, she might say it when telling of a spiritual retreat that struck her profoundly. But she might also use it to describe a meal shared with friends where masks fell and the fellowship became eucharistic. Or the perfume of a lilac bush wafting on a warmish spring breeze that seems, at least for one fleeting moment, to reveal all of the glory of God. "*It was beyond the beyond!*" Glory. Glorious. Glorify. Glorified. Jesus is clearly invoking the way beyond the beyond in this prayer when, praying to his and our heavenly Father, he invokes "*the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.*"

Meanwhile, back here on our earth and in our time, it seems to me at times that our friend whom I've mentioned seems to live the audacious notion that the glory of God is also meant for us and is in us. That glory may in fact have preexisted as part of the very nature of God. And glory may be prepared for us as part of the 'beyond the beyond' that awaits us in eternity but is also already present in and around us, even if we only recognize it in fleeting moments.

Again, St. Peter in today's epistle reading: '*the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.*' And Jesus in the portion of the High Priestly Prayer that we hear today, turns his prayer from his own glory to those, including you and me, who have sought to faithfully follow him: "*All mine are yours, and yours are mine,*" he prays, "*and I have been glorified in them.*" About 150 years later, one follower of Jesus, St. Irenaeus, imagined and insisted, perhaps even knew firsthand, that '*the glory of God is a human being fully alive.*'

I should probably emphasize that this glory is not merely a good times now or a remote future hope. St. Peter is writing to Christians who are being brutally persecuted. And the whole Farewell Discourse and High Priestly Prayer of Jesus anticipate his Passion and are bracketed by his betrayal. The very first verse of the Farewell Discourse begins with a reference to Judas: "*When he had gone out ...*" (Jn. 13:31a) And immediately after the Amen at the end of this prayer, we read, "*After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden ... Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place ...*" (Jn. 18:1-2a)

Ominous. And even so, even knowing all of this and the implications – even so: *glory*.

I wonder if and how, even with all that you or I may be experiencing or facing or fearing, we may know and affirm and cling to and recognize glory, the glory of God, made known in Christ, and already in us. Amen.