**The Father and I Are One**

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Those of you who have been following the daily Mass readings during the Easter Season might be getting a bit tired of Jesus’ long-winded discourses in the Gospel of John. Since many of them go on for a full chapter, we tend to hear them chopped up into segments on three consecutive days, with the same theme being repeated over and over again. To compound the monotony, another theme keeps resurfacing in numerous discourses and narratives – the special relationship that Jesus claims to have with his Heavenly Father.

The Gospel of John contains nearly 100 references to “the Father.” The vast majority are Jesus speaking about his own unique relationship with God. It’s not surprising that this theme would feature so prominently in John’s version of the Gospel, for he considers the relationship between Jesus and the Father to be the key to understanding who Jesus really is. The Prologue of Chapter 1 sets the stage for everything that will follow. Before narrating any events from Jesus’ earthly life, John first prepares his readers by speaking of the Incarnate Word, who was with God and begotten of God before time began. John wants every future reference to the Father and the Son to be understood in this context of the eternal Godhead, which is a communion of Divine Persons. Jesus is not just an extraordinary human being, anointed by God to complete a messianic mission. He is a co-equal and co-eternal member of the Holy Trinity, sent by the Father to live and die as a human being, in order to save us and give us eternal life.

Unlike the three synoptic gospels, which focus more on Jesus’ teaching and ministry, John’s gospel puts the emphasis squarely on Jesus’ *identity* as the Son of God, sent by the Father. While the other gospel writers show Jesus asserting his authority to teach and to forgive sins, and working miracles to demonstrate that authority, John has Jesus saying repeatedly that he does *nothing* on his own initiative. He says *only* what the Father has commanded him to say. He teaches *only* what he has heard from the Father. And, the works that he performs are *exactly* what the Father has commanded him to do. In short, he says and does absolutely *nothing* apart from the Father.

Jesus also says plainly, on several occasions, “*The Father and I are one*.” You would think that such a powerful and definitive statement would be clear enough for all of his disciples to grasp, yet they fail to recognize the enormous significance of this claim. Perhaps they think that Jesus is using a figure of speech, to indicate that he is a faithful servant of God, like Moses or one of the Prophets. Even at the Last Supper, Philip, one of the first to follow Jesus, says, “Show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.” Jesus seems almost disheartened that one who has been with him for so long still does not understand what he has been saying from the beginning of his public life: “The one who has seen me *has seen the Father*, for we are one.”

Though his disciples are slow to understand Jesus’ meaning, the scribes and Pharisees understand immediately and are scandalized by what they hear. By calling God his Father and saying that the two of them are one, Jesus is making himself equal to God! Since he is clearly a human being, yet he *claims* equality with God, the religious authorities have no choice but to charge him with blasphemy. Notice that Jesus never argues with this interpretation of his words. He never says, “No, I’m just a man, not God.” Rather, he acknowledges that they *do understand him correctly*, but *do not believe* in him. He *would* be guilty of blasphemy, if he were not who he claimed to be.

During his Last Supper discourse, Jesus returns to the theme of his inseparable union with the Father. But then, in a surprising turn, he also includes *his disciples* in that special relationship with the Father. He describes them as the Father’s gift to him, and he says that it is both the Father’s will and his own will that they never be lost. The Father wants all of them to be saved, and Jesus wants them to share eternal life with him in “his Father’s house.” Even before they reach the end of their earthly lives and enter into that perfect union, Jesus pledges that he and his Father will dwell in them, if they only obey his commandments. In particular, they must love one another as he has loved them, and as the Father has loved him. That is how disciples, though they remain mere human beings, can be one with the Divine Father, who *is Love*.

We believe that everything Jesus said of his disciples at the Last Supper also applies to us Christians today. *We* also are the Father’s gift to him. The Father wants to save *all of us*, just as much as he wanted to save the first group of disciples. Jesus has prepared a place for *us* in his Father’s house, just as he prepared places for the Twelve. And, even now, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit will dwell in *us*, if only we obey the Lord’s commandments, especially his commandment to love.

Jesus and the Father are one. That truth is so shocking as to appear blasphemous. Jesus and the Father both invite us sinful human beings to be one with them. That truth is simply too marvelous to comprehend!