

## Homily for Thursday in the Third Week after Pentecost

June 18, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Year 2, Proper 6: *Ecclesiasticus* 48:1–14; *Psalms* 97:1–6; *Matthew* 6:7–15

When I was preparing my sermon for Corpus Christi, I came across two articles on ecumenism, that is, the restoration of unity among Christians, by Maxwell Johnson, professor of liturgy at Notre Dame and an ELCA pastor. One appeared in the journal *Worship* in 2006, the second in the journal *Liturgical Ministry* in 2011.<sup>1</sup> If I may, one subtext of Professor Johnson's approach might be said to be words from John, "Jesus then said to the Jude'ans who had believed in him, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.'"<sup>2</sup>

The earlier article had a dedication, "In Memory of Godfrey Diekmann, O.S.B., and James F. White: Two Ecumenical Liturgiologists." Both men were among the most important liturgical scholars of their generation. Diekmann died in 2002, White in 2004.

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<sup>1</sup> Maxwell E. Johnson, "Liturgy and Ecumenism: Gifts, Challenges, and Hopes for a Renewed Vision," *Worship* 80 (January 2006), 2–29; Maxwell E. Johnson, "Ecumenism and the Study of Liturgy: What Shall We Do Now?," *Liturgical Ministry* 20 no.1 Wint. 2011, 13–21.

<sup>2</sup> John 8:31–32. My translation.

Diekmann was a monk of Saint John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota. White was United Methodist pastor and professor of theology at Notre Dame. Johnson shared this recollection in the conclusion to the article, "Liturgy and Ecumenism: Gifts, Challenges, and Hopes for a Renewed Vision." He wrote, "I recall Godfrey Diekmann telling of his first experiences in the Lutheran–Catholic dialogue. According to Godfrey, the group was trying to figure out what they might do to begin and someone suggested that they pray together the 'Our Father,' the Lord's Prayer. And, after doing so, there was not a dry eye in the room. There was rather silence because of this initial and profound awareness that it is the common Spirit who makes us one, the Spirit of God in all the baptized who calls out, 'Abba, Father!' From the beginning of ecumenical dialogue, then, at least in this context, ecumenism and worship, ecumenism and prayer went together."<sup>3</sup>

Professor Ulrich Luz in his commentary on the Lord's Prayer thinks that one of its greatest strengths is the breadth of possibilities in its meaning—and that "the openness of this prayer is intentional."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Johnson, "Ecumenism and the Study of Liturgy," 28.

<sup>4</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007), 314.

It was while I was serving at Saint Luke's in Baton Rouge that a colleague reminded me that the place of the Lord's Prayer in the Eucharist was made by Pope Gregory the Great—bishop of Rome from 590 until his death in 604—so that the Lord's Prayer, said by all, would be “the climax of the Consecration.”<sup>5</sup>

Luz writes, “Gregory regarded the Lord's Prayer as part of the [invocation of the Holy Spirit] of the canon and together with it as the table grace offered at the Eucharist.”<sup>6</sup>

At seminary, we were introduced to the setting of the contemporary Lord's Prayer to a chant written by the late McNeil Robinson while he was organist and music director at Saint Mary's. It's a beautiful chant and singable chant. During my first few years here, as I began really to understand the acoustics of our building, I'm sure this acoustic influenced his composition. And I wondered when we might use it.

During my only visit to Israel, in July 2006, while my friends and I were in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, I heard the music of the ancient chant for singing the Lord's Prayer. I didn't recognize the

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<sup>5</sup> Shepherd, 81–82.

<sup>6</sup> Luz, 312.

language at all, but the tune belongs in the Christian West to the Lord's Prayer. I'm sure English is not the only-non-Latin version of this most important prayer. I'm sure many non-English speaking visitors to Saint Mary's have heard us singing it in English and knew what it was because of the music. I won't be the rector not to use the traditional tune—dare I say, maybe we will have the contemporary set to the traditional tune?

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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