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Where Preached	SAK	Appointed Readings	Easter 7, Yr B

" Jesus prayed, ... 'Holy Father, ... [*s*]anctify them' "



One of the greatest joys of our emergence from COVID, for me, has been the ability to once again visit my mother, who suffers from dementia and lives in the town where I grew up in southern New Jersey. My most recent visit was a week or so ago. I got to her room at about 11 AM, said "hi" through my mask and face shield and sat down next to her bed. I noticed that she seemed a bit groggy. A few minutes later she'd nodded off, and a few minutes after *that*, she was snoring away with the best of them. I laughed to myself: a three-hour car ride to watch my mother take a nap! I wondered what I was going to do to pass the time.

But as I sat there, it came to me that this was probably a reverse image of our life together some fifty or more years ago. I pictured my mother sitting next to my crib, watching me sleep as an infant ... or maybe sitting on the floor next to my bed when I was having trouble going to sleep as a toddler. Soon enough, my sitting there watching my mother sleep—oblivious to my presence and yet, I felt, *also* somehow aware of it—felt like the most natural thing in the world. We weren't two people who were failing to interact, but rather, a *unity*—a single relationship—re-visiting an old, established pattern of being together that didn't require words or even (for one of us) consciousness. The two of us were the *oneness* of mother-and-child: our primordial existence, if you will, that transcended the ravages of her cruel disease; the passage of decades; and our inability to communicate.

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I don't often share intimate details like this in my preaching, but I mention this today because I had begun writing this sermon when I visited my mother, and the experience of oneness I had with her that day became, for me, the tenor of the message I hear Jesus speaking in today's gospel reading. Rather than ONENESS, Jesus speaks of our SANCTIFICATION¹: our being made HOLY. It's an uncommon word in the gospels. Only St John uses it, and then quite sparingly: three times in today's reading and once back in chapter 10. And the rarity of this word underscores the very specific—and very special—idea that John uses it to convey.

Jesus first uses SANCTIFY in John's gospel when He tells some violent opponents that the Father "SANCTIFIED" Him. That is to say, the Holy Father (as Jesus calls Him in today's reading) made Jesus holy ... made Jesus of the same essence as God the Father.² There is oneness ... oneness of

¹ The Greek word is ἁγιάζω, which means "to make holy."

² I speak a bit carelessly here, for the sake of simplicity since this is a sermon and not a theology lecture. *For the record*: I do not suggest that there was ever a time when the Word of God did not exist; or that the Word (which became manifest on earth as Jesus) is not co-eternal and co-substantial with the Father. "Begotten not made" is the operative phrase here. Otherwise, we tread upon the verge of the heresy of Arianism. None of this doctrine (or the controversy that spawned it), however, existed at the time Jesus (or St John, for that matter) lived and taught, so I am taking Jesus' words in John *on the terms that the human beings He was speaking to would have used to understand them*.

identity; unity ... between the God the Father and Jesus because they share the divine holiness of God. The Holy Father made holy the Son of God. Thus, as we hear Jesus say, everything that is the Father's is also the Son's: the people of God ... the name of God ... the words of God ... the truth of God. There is no 'daylight' between the Father and the Son: They are a holy *One*.

And being in this Oneness, Jesus asks the Holy Father, in our reading today, to sanctify *us*, as well. Jesus tells the Father that just as the Father sent the Son into the world to share the Word of God, Jesus intends to send His followers—*us*—into the world, to proclaim that Word. Therefore, we are to be sanctified ... made holy: The Holy Father and the Holy Son make holy the People of God. The divine holiness that is the Oneness of the Father and the Son is imparted to us, and we become part of the holy *One*.³ There is no 'daylight' between God and us, either. In human relationship, my mother and I are two individuals but share an unconscious, unspoken unity. In divine relationship, Jesus binds our individual existence—our being ↓ human—in fundamental and total oneness with God; oneness that encompasses and transcends everything else we may be or do. If God napped, it would be as natural for us to sit and gaze tenderly at God snoozing as it is for God to watch over us when *we* sleep.

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I find this utterly staggering—at once staggeringly profound and staggeringly beautiful: As He concludes His final prayer before sacrificing Himself on the Cross, Jesus makes us One with God.⁴ No aspect of *our* existence—no virtue or vice; no beauty or ugliness—does not also exist within God. And because God wills our Oneness, we cannot forfeit it. Yes, we should bear fruit ... but if we don't, we are still in divine unity with God. Yes, we should grow love ... do unto others; help the injured traveler lying in the road; turn the other cheek; when someone takes our coat, offer our shirt, too ... but howsoever those things elude us (and they will!), we are *still* in holy Oneness with Christ.

This is the ultimate, most profound, most exquisite Easter message of all: The Resurrection demands no *quid pro quo*; exacts no penalty when our flawed and fractured humanity once again bests our perfect divinity. Just as the Holy Father sanctified the Son—made the Son one with Father—simply because the Father desired it; so the Holy Son has sanctified us—made us one with the Father and the Son—simply because Jesus desired it.

This oneness was Jesus' ultimate mission in this world, and He has accomplished it, forever. Easter is the Heavening-of-earth because in rising again, Jesus destroyed the power of death and inducted all humanity into the eternity of God. He tore down the gate between 'this life' and the 'after life'; He erased any distinction between 'this world' and the 'world to come.' We have only one body, and that is the body of the Risen Christ. There is only one world, and that is the eternal

³ Technically, this takes place through and on account of Jesus' death: "And for their sakes I sanctify myself [manifest God's supreme holiness, through sacrificial death], so that they may be sanctified in truth."

⁴ Perhaps it might be more accurate to say that Jesus' prayer for our sanctification is that His Death will *effect* our oneness with God; that in this prayer, we hear Jesus 'announce' what end His death will bring about. Fair enough, but that's a nuance for the classroom that we can bypass in a sermon.

world of the Holy One, without boundaries of time or place. Our existence is one continuous and endless line, which is *Holy Oneness-in-God*: which is, my friends, Heaven upon earth. Alleluia!



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