

4 May, 2008
Fr. Richard L. Green

Well this is the Sunday where we begin winding up the stories of Jesus' earthly ministries. We're in that last week. We experienced (though it may have gone right past you since it always comes in the middle of the week) the Ascension. Next Sunday is Pentecost, which is the feast in which we remember the coming of the Holy Spirit.

So the message today is this closure. We heard in The Acts of the Apostles a bit about the Ascension and that admonition, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up to heaven?' Arsenio Hall would have said, "Let's get busy..."

Then in the gospel, we heard a piece of what's called Jesus' farewell discourse. This is actually pre-crucifixion but it's just as fitting here because it's Jesus speaking to his disciples and he is giving a prayer. He's praying to God about them. He's talked for about two chapters at this point, but he's praying and at the end we get this prayer where he's saying, "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're in the world and I'm 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."

Protect them in your name that you have given me so that *they* may be one as *we* are one.

Coo-coo-ka-choo. It does have that feeling of kind of a Beatles' song about oneness. And we use that kind of language, but what are we talking about? What are we talking about?

Well, I think some of the things that we're not talking about is what in some religious and political circles would mean oneness of mind – that everybody agrees about everything. That there's no difference of opinion, there's no difference in worldview, there's no difference about social issues, there's no difference about how you're supposed to live in the world, there's no difference about anything. And if you differ, than you're not One. Conformity equals unity. I don't think that's what he's talking about here.

Another thing I don't think he's talking about – I found this morning in the comics in the Oregonian one of my childhood heroes, Prince Valiant. You ever notice how he doesn't age? I'm older than Prince Valiant and he hasn't changed. He's been around long before I came on the scene. But it's our story: Here (you can't see this but I'm going to act like you can), here is Valiant and he's up on the steps, leading up to some big civic building and there's this beautiful woman up here wearing a crown that seems to be glowing and then there's all these soldiers down here with their hands raised in the air... and it says here, "Makita wears the crown of Solomon, the warlord Twadorik is undone and destroyed. The erstwhile rebel warriors lay down their weapons and in unity, they thunder, "All hail the new Queen of Absaba!" I don't think that's what they're talking

about in the gospel of John, either. It's sort of unity under threat of death. You gotta go along, or we're gonna kill ya. I don't think that's what it's talking about, either.

I also don't think it's talking about us becoming just kin of an amorphous blob with no individuation of any kind.

I think that it's out in the realms that our language has very little ability to describe. It's similar if not the same as the Kingdom of God in all the imagery. Jesus was never really able to just give us a bullet point definition of the Kingdom of God and this may be the same thing, or at least the same sort of thing, where words cannot describe exactly what it is that we're talking about. Partly that's because we have so little experience of it. We think.

When Jesus says he prays that we may be one as he and the Father are one, I think that for me to try to describe that I'm going to have to do what he did, which is go to parables. Parables are useful when you don't have words to describe.

So here's parable one about being One:

The Bensons sold their house to the Hansons and when the Hansons moved, they took their hot tub from their house out on the west side of town and moved it over to the old west side. But where they live, right where Kessler meets Ocean Beach, they might as well have put the hot tub out on the corner for all the privacy they would have had. And so they decided they were going to get rid of it because it was just taking up space standing on edge in the garage. And they at least needed to have that space that it was occupying as a pathway through all the stuff that's still [not] unpacked.

So Kathleen and Aidan and I stepped forward to try to help out and relieve them of this burden. We made arrangements and finally there was a day that it wasn't raining and we – this thing is *big!* It's a six-person hot tub – and the owner's manual says that the dry weight is 530 pounds. So I went over and rented a couple of those little piano moving dollies, which, you know are not very high-tech. There are four casters on a little wood frame.

I managed to - no, Jan managed to get Joe Sudar to come help. So there it was: Myself, Joe and David Hanson (of course there was Aidan supervising), and I'm thinking, 'Oh, gosh I hope we live to tell the tale.' Remember, 530 pounds.

We're walking toward the Hanson's from our house and our neighbor Ian Thompson and a friend come rolling up and say, "Oh, what's going on here?" They see the dollies. I said, "Go to the Hanson's, and we'll tell you." SO they pull over and we open the garage door and there's this tub. Now there's five of us. Amazingly, we get this 530-pound hot tub rather easily up onto these dollies.

We're going down the sidewalk – I just love the image. I wish I could have been a fly on the wall watching a hot tub on edge going down the sidewalk in the old west side.

Then we get out in the street. We're going up the street, in the middle of the street. We get over; we go in the alley to get over behind our house so we can get the thing in... I've got some PVC and we roll it like building the pyramids, right? Three pieces...

We roll it across the yard, we get it into place, and we start to lay the thing down on the ground so we can move it up onto the pad that I built. We pick it up and we start moving it, and Ian says, "Who's carrying this? I don't have it." None of us do – none of us are carrying any appreciable weight. Its 530 pounds. By this point, Nate comes. There's six of us, its 530 pounds, and none of us have any sense of carrying the weight.

We get it into place. Start to finish from the time we left our house, we go down and wheel it back and get it into place is less than 30 minutes. We rolled over a block down the street.

Something was happening in the gathering of people, in the sharing of the load that made this seemingly ridiculous enterprise easy. It kind of reminds me of church.

The next parable I saw in the paper. I found out later that it was the number one news story on Yahoo! and the people involved have been on twenty or thirty TV talk shows. It took place sometime this week, I think.

It was the story of a woman's softball game between Central Washington University and Western Oregon. I believe the score was tied at two, Western Oregon was at bat. One of the women who was a senior and who had never hit a home run was at the plate. There was a runner on.

The windup and the pitch: She poles this thing over the center field wall. She's rounding first and she misses touching the bag. If you miss touching the bag, even on a home run, all they have to do is get the ball that's going to be in play, walk over, step on the bag [and] you're out. No home run.

So she stops to go back to touch the bag and in doing so, in turning it blows out her knee. It drops her to the ground. She's crawling back to first so she can touch the base. Now if any of the players on her team assist her, she's called out. If they send in a pinch runner it's no longer a home run, it's a single. So what happens?

Two women from the Central Washington team go to her, pick her up in a fireman's carry. She's sitting on their arms. They carry her around the bases so that she can be lowered down and touch each base. The rules don't say an opposing player can't help.

Who would have thought?

They take her all the way around until she can touch home and scores what turn out to be the winning runs and all but ending Central Washington's season.

This was more than just making nice. This was so far beyond what any of us ever would have called good sportsmanship that it's hard to even imagine that happening. So hard that there was nothing in the rules about it. They sacrificed, essentially (in the world of sport), everything. And when asked why they did it, they said, "She hit a home run. She deserved to get credit for it."

Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me so that they may be one as we are one.

Amen.