

7 Easter: May 17, 2015
 St Stephen's, San Jose
 Acts 1:15-17, 21-26
 1 John 5:9-13
 John 17:6-19

This reading from John's Gospel is a part of what is called "Jesus' High Priestly prayer". It was said aloud for his disciples to hear, after they had shared the Last Supper, only hours before his arrest.

Jesus says his prayer within the disciples' hearing, and it is recorded for our learning how Jesus links us to God and himself; becoming interconnected in some mystical way. Jesus prayed for God to provide four things to his disciples and to all of us who follow after them; protection, unity, joy, and sanctification.

It is this mystical union with God that I want to discuss with you today. By our living toward deeper union with God, Jesus says that we achieve and experience union with each other. By keeping our eyes and minds on God, and by all of us seeking deeper one-ness with God, there is a resonance created among us that reaches deeper than any human friendship.

I came across a wonderful description of this resonance that Jesus was describing; a resonance with God, and with each other. It was written by Christine Valters Paintner. She is a Benedictine Oblate, an author on spiritual growth, living in Galway, Ireland. (patheos.com)

She writes:

I was sitting in St. Ephrem, a small Orthodox stone church near the Sorbonne in Paris, listening to the sublime solo suites for cello by Johann Sebastian Bach. The young man playing did not have sheet music; he knew this entire piece by heart. His eyes were closed as he stretched the bow back and forth in a kind of dance, his whole body was alert and engaged in this act of offering to the gathered crowd.

I was struck there in the middle of the piece by the awareness that he had spent likely thousands of hours practicing so that this moment he could offer his gift so freely to us. At one time, there was not such ease, and he was not able to yet play by heart. Hours upon hours were spent with attentive practice, showing up to the instrument and to his own longing - to let music emerge from it. His holding of the bow and drawing it across the strings, the careful placement of his fingers that had now become a kinesthetic memory, developing the proper rhythm and tempo, even his punctuated breaths at the moments of pause were in some measure learned over time, practiced.

I imagine the many events of his life that could have called his attention away from his practice. Perhaps the death of a parent, the shattering of a love relationship, his own struggle with illness, or just the daily ache of living. And somehow he kept showing up to the practice.

And then there was the moment he sat down to play and the sheet music remained closed, as did his eyes, and his entire body remembered what he had practiced again and again. He suddenly found ease and flow and no longer had to labor to get things just right, he no longer had to engage in such a painstaking and attentive way. He could lose himself in the music. He became the instrument through which the cello could sing. ... And so it is with us.

Paintner's experience provides a wonderful example of achieving unity between an instrument, a piece of music, and the musician. This carries a lesson on spiritual unity. "And so with us." We certainly do not all think alike. We do not feel the same about everything; we do not all like the same things. But we are united in our commitment to learn from each other how to take on the mind of Christ. Our unity isn't something we can do within ourselves; it is something that comes from 'remaining in Jesus'. It come from lots of practice; from investing time and thought; in Bible study, in praying for each other, donating clothing, sponsoring children in boarding school, and running a preschool. It comes from sharing our life journey with each other. Jesus asked that the unity he shares with God would incorporate us. He said, "so that they may be one, as we are one." He has provided for us a force outside ourselves and greater than ourselves, to help make that happen.

How do you rehearse the personality of Christ in your life?

How do you commit to memory the teaching from Christ?

Like the cellist who no longer needs to read the music, or watch the placement of his fingers on the strings, when do you close your eyes and pray in the Spirit; sing from your soul; and speak from a place of Godly wisdom?

How do you free yourself from the formalities of teaching, to forgive; to generously share; and to openly care more for others than for yourself?

This one-ness with God defines our faith journey. May God bless and nurture your experience as faith family; for this to be the laboratory where we grow in one-ness.

Amen.