

7th Sunday of Easter – B

A few years ago a woman who was upset came out of church after Mass and said, “Father I found out that I might have cancer and I will have some tests this week. Will you say a prayer for me?” “Absolutely,” I said. I bowed my head, put my hand on her shoulder and began to pray, “Father, I ask you to take care of your daughter.” Before I got another word out the woman, with her eyes wide open stopped me and said, “Father, I didn’t mean right now! Hearing you pray for me makes me uncomfortable. It’s embarrassing. Pray for me after I’ve left so I don’t have to hear the prayer.”

Catholics are accustomed to ritual prayer and praying with the whole community. But, many people, like that woman, are very uncomfortable when someone just breaks out in prayer. Spontaneous, open prayer for a person is a rare occurrence for most Catholics. It simply has not been part of our tradition for the most part. If a priest were to take out a ritual book and began the Sacrament of the Sick, however, that would be different, and easier.

It’s easier to understand these differences because for Catholics, public prayer is usually in the form of ritual or in common memorized prayers like the “Hail Mary” or “Bless us O Lord” before meals. For us private prayer is usually much more intimate and personal. Intimate prayer can make people uncomfortable simply because it is intimate.

In John’s gospel today we hear Jesus pray very intimately for his disciples. It is like the apostles overhear Jesus praying – for them. “Father, keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be open as we are one.” If I were one of the apostles I would want to tune to hear what Jesus is praying for – for me. My father used to pray for each of us kids at home every night at supper. Sometimes you could tell how much trouble you were in by what he prayed for. That wasn’t the way it was always because he always thanked God for our accomplishments as well. I always

recommend to couples anticipating marriage that they pray *for* each other *in front of* each other. It does a great deal to promote intimacy and unity in their relationship. I always wondered if any of those couples ever tried my advice. I think maybe twice a couple came and told me years later that they tried it and it does work.

In another part of that Last Supper prayer, not recorded here, Jesus prayed not only for his apostles but for all those who would come to believe through them – that’s us! It is a comforting thought to realize that Jesus prayed for *us* at the Last Supper. We are the ones who have come to believe through them, even if through a series of others influenced by the apostles.

May we, through prayer – in the words of today’s opening prayer – “experience His abiding presence among us.”