

God's People

- Today, as we listen quietly to Jesus' long prayer to the Father, as we lean in a little closer to hear the intimate murmurings of the beloved, we are driven to silence.
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- While we are used to praying, and speaking and hoping we are heard; today, we are listeners.
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- Today, it is Jesus who prays for us.
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- And as we listen, Jesus reminds us about who God is, what God is like, and who Jesus calls us to be.
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- Jesus discloses God to us. "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world," Jesus whispers.
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- To make known to us God's name is really to make known the character of God.
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- Now we can know what God is like because we see what Jesus does.
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- The Living God is not an absentee God. The Living God is a devoted God, devoted to us, devoted to all humanity.
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- God is a devoted God from the very start:
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- As God wandered in the Garden of Eden;
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- As God met Moses in the burning bush, commanding him, despite his stutter, despite his fear, to confront that most powerful ruler and say: "Let my people go!"
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- God's devotion to us is in the poems sung in the Song of Songs, where God says to you, to me: "Rise up, my darling, my fairest, come away...." Songs 2:10.
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- God's devotion to us comes into our world through the womb of a courageous teenage girl, and living among us, shows us not what it means to be spiritual, but what it means to be human.
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- God's devotion is not always gentle.
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- It confronts the self-righteous religious leaders, calling them out in an effort to free them from the complacent arrogance in which they are so firmly rooted.
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- That devotion takes Jesus to the very gates of hell, confronting the demons who know him, and it takes Jesus face to face with illness, with infirmity and with death.
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- But when Jesus shows up, the lame walk, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised; such is God's devotion to us.
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- In his intimate prayer today with the Father, Jesus prays for the whole world, the whole world that God has given to his care.
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- He promises eternal life to the whole world.
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- Did you hear it?
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- "You have given him authority *over all people*, to give eternal life *to all* whom you have given him." Jn. 17:2.
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- So much for "us verses them." So much for our petty religious squabbles, for our lists of who's "in" and who's "out."
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- The Creator of all that is insists that he intends to have back everything in creation: even the sinners, even the ungrateful, even....the Boston Red Socks.
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- As we eavesdrop on Jesus' intimate prayer in today's gospel, hearing Jesus ask, on our behalf, that we may be one as the Trinity is one, we are given a glimpse of what life is like in the Kingdom of God.
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- And with that glimpse, there is a hint of what we can expect in that Kingdom, what we might practice, so that as the Kingdom pokes it's way into this world, perhaps we will have the eyes to see it, the ears to hear it, the voice to say: "Aha! It is near!"
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- Bishop Wright explains: "Love is not our duty. It is our destiny.
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- "Love is the language Jesus speaks, and we are called to speak it so we can talk with him.
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- "Love is the food they eat in God's new world, and we must acquire a taste for it here and now.
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- "Love is the music God writes for all his creatures to sing and we are called to learn it and practice it now, to be ready when the conductor brings down the baton.
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- "This is the message that underlines the gospel command to forgiveness.
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- "Forgiveness is not a moral rule that comes with sanctions attached.
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- "Forgiveness is a way of life; God's way of life.
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- "If you close your heart to forgiveness, then, you close your heart to forgiveness.

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- "That is the point of the terrifying story in Matthew, of a man who was forgiven millions, but refused to forgive another a few dollars."
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- Bishop Wright concludes:
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- "If you lock up the piano because you don't want to play for somebody else, how can God play for you?" N.T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, 288.
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- Perhaps this is what Peter is getting at in his letter today.
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- "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time."
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- And again,
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- "Cast all your anxiety on him, for he cares for you."
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- "Rise up, my darling, my fairest, come away," God beckons.
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- We are God's people.
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- Because Jesus is who he says he is, we are God's people.
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- So how are we to act?
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- Since Jesus is telling the truth, then we know that God's way is the way of reconciliation; the way of forgiveness; and we also know that God's way rejects the powers and values of the world.
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- God's way refuses to be violent, even when that refusal lands his Son, hands pierced, body bleeding, hanging on a cross.
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- There's no question it's easier said than done.
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- Rejecting violence is all well and good, until someone attacks us.
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- The parties in the streets at the death of Bin Laden, our three wars in the Middle East, our efforts to balance government budgets on the backs of the poor and the elderly, while leaving welfare for the war machine and welfare for big business untouched, demonstrate that we are far from the gentleness of Jesus, the compassion of Jesus, the generosity of Jesus.
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- And yet, we are God's people.
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- We are a people called to unity with the whole human race.
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- For that is the prayer of Jesus today, as he thanks the Father for giving him "authority over all people," so that eternal life can be given to all people. Jn. 17:2.
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- The gospel today beckons us to nurture a society of peaceful reconciliation, right here, right now, in this, our family.
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- For that life is eternal life.
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- Eternal life is not pie in the sky in the sweet by and by; eternal life is right here, in our midst, just waiting for us to enter into it's mysteries.
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- Fr. Vince Donovan was a missionary priest among the Masai, an ancient nomadic tribe of herdsmen in East Africa.
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- The Masai have a wonderful tradition using grass as a symbol of reconciliation.
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- When the priest enters the village for the mass, the tribe begins to dance and sing, long before the time for the Eucharist.
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- And while that dancing and singing is going on, the people pass a tuft of grass to one another.
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- The grass is not just a symbol of peace, it is peace itself.
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- Passing the tufts of grass is the passing of peace.
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- Taking it, giving it, means peace between the one who takes and the one who gives.
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- And sometimes, one refuses to give it.
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- And sometimes, one refuses to receive it.
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- When that happens, there is no Eucharist.
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- The village elders won't insult the unity that the Eucharist represents unless the grass has been given and received by all.
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- Like our Masai brothers and sisters, we are a colony of heaven on earth.
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- We are called to live differently from the wisdom of the world.
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- We are the people of God.
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- And we are different.
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- Notice, if you will, in a few moments, when we pray the Nicene Creed.
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- Aside from Jesus, only two people are mentioned in the Creed.

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- One is Mary.
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- The other is Pilate.
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- One said "yes" to God.
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- The other said "no."
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- The teenage girl, and Pilate: the face of the empire.
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- May the courage of that teenage girl be ours.
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- We are the people of God.
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- May we be one, as the Living God is one.
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- +amen.
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