

flesh and become man, to suffer, to die, and to rise again for us and for our salvation. Again, St. John so beautifully writes, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son . . .” (John 3:16).

Second, because God loves us first, we love Him (1 John 4:19). If we know Him as our loving, forgiving father, as our Lord and Savior who in love for us, died for us; how can we not love Him in return—how can we reject His commandment of love: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matt 22:37)?

Finally, the love that unites God to us and us to God also unites us to each other. Jesus said, “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you” (John 15:12), and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:39). St. John writes; “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:10–11).

Correct faith and living in God’s unconditional love are the only way to unity in Christ’s Church.

### *Unity of Faith and Love Results in Joy*

**I**n our text Jesus said, “these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.” Disunity in the Church causes great trouble, frustration, anger, jealousy, and despair, but true unity always bears the beautiful and gentle fruit of joy.

Hear what Scripture says about this: “and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,” (1 Pet 1:8); “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid *again*; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” (Matt 13:44); “make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.” (Phil 2:2); “I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.” (3 John 1:4).

### *Conclusion*

**J**esus prayed “that we may be one.” His Disciples exhorted us to this unity of faith and love, and Jesus specifically connected all this to joy. Joy is the fruit of the oneness for which Christ prayed and for this unity we must pray more fervently than ever before. The Anaphora prayers of the Church always end in every Divine Liturgy with these words: “Grant us with one mouth and one heart to glorify and praise Thine all-honorable and majestic Name, of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages.” May our prayer echo our Lord’s prayer: **O Lord, grant that we may be one, and fill us with Your joy! Amen.**



## THAT THEY MAY BE ONE

*“Disunity in the Church causes great trouble, frustration, anger, jealousy, and despair, but true unity always bears the beautiful and gentle fruit of joy.”*

## †Gospel: John 17:1–13 (RSV)

AT THAT TIME Jesus lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son that the Son may glorify Thee, since Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom Thou hast given Him. And this is eternal life, that they know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent. I glorified Thee on earth, having accomplished the work which Thou gavest Me to do; and now, Father, glorify Thou Me in Thy own presence with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was made. I have manifested Thy Name to the men whom Thou gavest Me out of the world; Thine they were, and Thou gavest them to Me, and they have kept Thy word. Now they know that everything that Thou hast given Me is from Thee; for I have given them the words which Thou gavest Me, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from Thee; and they have believed that Thou didst send Me. I am praying for them; I am not praying for the world but for those whom Thou hast given Me, for they are Thine; all Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine, and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to Thee. Holy Father, keep them in Thy Name, which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as We are one. While I was with them, I kept them in Thy Name, which Thou have given Me; I have guarded them, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition, that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to Thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves."

### *Introduction*

Jesus prayed specifically for the unity of believers in His Church, and He then connected this unity with joy. Today if we look at the whole of Christianity we see almost no unity and very little joy. Even if we narrow our view just to the Orthodox Church, we still see much disunity over minutia and too often the joyless judgmentalism of the Pharisee. More than ever, we need to pay close attention to these beautiful words of our Lord in His High Priestly Prayer just before His Crucifixion. We need to hear once again the truth about unity and joy in Christ's Church.

### *Unity Is Connected to the Name of God and to Correct Belief*

Jesus prayed: "Father, . . . I have manifested Thy Name to the men whom Thou gavest Me out of the world; . . . and they have kept Thy word. . . . for I have given them the words which Thou gavest Me, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from Thee; and they have believed that Thou didst send Me. . . . Holy Father, keep them in Thy Name, which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one,"

Unity comes from gathering and identifying around a name. People are united who use the names, Democrat or Republican. Unity of purpose and interest comes when people identify with the name of their college or university. Using the same last name binds us together as a family.

Now all of these illustrations are imperfect because we can obviously find examples where the name didn't really unite people or only united them in a limited way. But the Name of Jesus Christ should unite us completely and eternally. "There is no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved"—saved eternally and united to the family of God.

To be kept in God's Name is also to be a keeper of Christ's Word—to be centered around Christ—to know that Christ is all and in all—to courageously bear the

name of Christ. To be a keeper of Christ's Word is to receive and believe Christ's teachings about Himself, about the Holy Trinity, about our world, and about ourselves, and to receive these teachings unpolluted, uncorrupted, unchanged from when He gave them to us—to keep His commandments just as He spoke them and taught them to His Apostles.

Unity in the Church comes when we are kept in the Name of Christ and keep the Word that He taught us. This is exactly the purpose for the first ecumenical council in Nicea—and for the other six ecumenical councils to follow. The unity of the Church of Jesus Christ was threatened by the false teaching of Arius, a priest from Alexandria, Egypt. Christ's Word was corrupted and reinterpreted to mean something completely different from what He originally taught. The Holy Fathers of the 4th Century A.D. therefore gathered together in Christ's Name and reaffirmed the Orthodox faith—the Word spoken to them by Jesus Christ through His Apostles and accurately delivered and taught to faithful men and women for the 300 years leading up to this first Ecumenical Council. The result of the council was unity in the Church of Jesus Christ—the Holy Fathers of this council gathered in His Name and kept His Word.

When we believe and confess the same truth as our Holy Fathers, we are one with them, but unity also implies that we believe and confess the truth with each other. The unity that Jesus prayed for is both a unity of belief with the Fathers of our Church and a unity of belief with our present Orthodox brothers and sisters. We embrace "the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints" (Jude 1:3). On the Sunday of Orthodoxy, the unity of Orthodox people worldwide, past and present, is demonstrated as they confess their common Faith with one voice and one heart that "This is the Faith of the Apostles; this is the Faith of the Fathers; this is the Faith of the Orthodox; this is the Faith which has established the universe!"

### *Unity of Correct Belief Is Connected to Living in God's Love*

Before our text and after our text Jesus spoke these words: "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:10). . . . The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me" (John 17:22,23).

When we are united in the name of Christ and in the True faith, we will always be united in love—first, God's love for us, then our love for God, and finally our love for each other.

St. John the Theologian clearly states that God is love. God's interaction with all His creation and especially with mankind is motivated by His Divine Love. God's love created us, God's love sustains us, God's love protects us, God's love redeems us, God's love forgives us, God's love embraces and accepts all repentant Prodigals back into His family. God's love sent His Son into the world to take on