



Lifting up his eyes to heaven, Jesus prayed, saying: "Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are. When I was with them I protected them in your name that you gave me, and I guarded them, and none of them was lost except the son of destruction, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you. I speak this in the world so that they may share my joy completely. I gave them your word, and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world. And I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth."

Introductory Prayer: Lord, I believe in you and all that you have revealed for our salvation. I hope in you because of your overflowing mercy. Every single act of yours on this earth demonstrated your love for us. Your ascent into heaven before the eyes of the Apostles inspires my hope of one day joining you there. I love you and wish you to be the center of my life.

Petition: Mary, help me to be an ardent witness to the truth of Christian love.

1. "So I Sent Them into the World" - Jesus has ascended into heaven. In today's Gospel, from the Last Supper, he transmits his mission to his apostles — and to each one of us. Just how transcendent is this undertaking which Christ places in our hands? It is nothing less than the eternal salvation of souls. Real, concrete persons' eternal destinies are linked to our faithfulness to Christ, to our Christian witness. Does not such a responsibility make us tremble in our weakness and sinfulness? How can we hope to

live up to such a mission? Yet Christ invites us to share his joy completely. He does not abandon us in his ascension but promises to consecrate us in the Spirit of Truth — the Holy Spirit, the great advocate in our apostolic mission. May we respond in prayer to the Church's liturgy this week as she prepares us to receive the Holy Spirit on the great feast of Pentecost.

2. “Consecrate Them in the Truth” - Just who is the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Blessed Trinity, the one who desires to become the gentle guest and consoler of our soul? The Holy Spirit is the personal love of the Father and Son for each other. As the liturgy's second reading reminds us, “God is love” (1 John 4:16). Only the Holy Spirit can enable us to undergo the journey of purifying and disciplining “eros” (human love or the love of attraction – “ascending love”), so that it can be healed and restored to its true grandeur (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, nos. 4-5). If we follow this ascetic path of renunciation, then eros will in the end merge with “agape” (Christian love or love which seeks only the good of the other – “descending love”) (cf. no. 7). The love of agape, forged within us by the Holy Spirit, will impel us to seek the good of souls without counting the cost.

3. “And I Consecrate Myself for Them” - How does Christ consecrate himself? He does so precisely in his passion and cross. That is why Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta's saying is ever valid: “Love, to be true love, has to hurt.” Pope-Emeritus Benedict XVI directly confronted the question of the renunciation demanded by true love. He asks if the Church doesn't spoil love. “Doesn't the Church, with all her commandments and prohibitions, turn to bitterness the most precious thing in life?” (*Deus Caritas Est*, no. 3). The answer, of course, is a resounding “No!” Only the asceticism of Christian chastity purifies and disciplines love so that it rises above the sensual sphere to become a truly personal act of self-giving. It is no coincidence that only natural family planning requires continence, whereas contraception does not. Are we willing to be hated by the world in standing up for this most fundamental of the Church's teachings to preserve authentic love?

Conversation with Christ: Holy Spirit, you are the source of love in my life because you are love itself. Help me to win all the graces for souls that Christ is asking of me by consecrating myself in truth — the truth of the cross, renunciation and purification — to live true love in self-giving, without counting the cost.

Resolution: I will both practice and defend the Church's teaching on chastity, especially natural family planning, in order to live authentic Christian love.