

MAY 20, 2026 FATHER PRAKASH ANTHONY LOHALE

In 2013, around 3:00 in the morning, a Pentecostal pastor in New York was suddenly wide awake. He was gripped by an unusual impulse, a strong impression to pray for the newly elected Pope Francis. Not being a Roman Catholic, he was further surprised by a deep sense that he was going to personally meet him. As he prayed, he was taken back in memory to his time as a young campus minister, where he saw different Christian denominations and organizations displaying their ministries on separate tables, and he felt that the Holy Spirit was speaking to his heart.

“Don’t set up another table. I have one Church, one Bride.”

By morning, he told his wife, “I believe we need to spend our days working for Christian unity.” That pastor, my dear friends, was Joe Toomey. What began as a prayer in the middle of the night became the John 17 Movement - a community of Catholics and Protestants, bishops and pastors gathered around the table, listening, praying, and loving one another the way Jesus commanded, that we may be one.

The John 17 Movement takes its name from the Gospel we heard today. Jesus, in his final hours before the cross, lifts his eyes toward heaven and prays for us. At the heart of that prayer is one word: “keep.”

“Holy Father, keep them in your name.”

I like the word “keep,” though some translations use “protect.” What are we being asked to keep?

Keep the faith.

Before Jesus speaks, John tells us he looked up into heaven, weighed down by anguish, knowing that he was going to be betrayed and would face the cross. He did not look into the darkness, he looked up. And that

is the first invitation, my dear brothers and sisters: keep the faith by keeping your gaze lifted upward.

Not because life is easy, but because our faith gives us direction, a daily choice to turn toward God, even when we feel distant, even when grief is heavy. Prayer, my dear friends, is not an escape from our problems; it is what keeps love and hope alive. Keep the faith. Keep looking up.

Notice that Jesus does not command unity, he prays for it, because he knew we could never achieve it on our own. He had watched his disciples argue about who was the greatest. He knew the seed of division in every human heart. Pope Francis puts it plainly: division is from the devil. He is the great divider who magnifies our faults, fractures our families, and destroys our communities, even our churches.

But it is the Holy Spirit who always moves us toward unity, bringing us together to share the table, to have honest conversations, and to discover that, across all our differences, we are all children of the same Father. John glimpsed something of this through that night.

And here is the urgency. Jesus tells us plainly: that they may be one so that the world might believe. The world, my dear friends, will not be won by our arguments, it will be moved by our love. So pray for unity. Build it one table at a time, one encounter at a time.

Finally, Jesus prays: “Sanctify them in the truth.” This does not mean guarding documents like a sentry at a locked door. In John’s Gospel, we are told that truth is not a proposition, it is a person. Truth is Christ himself, the full revelation of the Father’s love.

My dear brothers and sisters, Jesus is still praying this prayer right now. He stands before the Father, interceding for each one of us. We are not on our own, we never were. So let us answer his prayer with our lives:

faith when the night is dark, unity built one encounter at a time, and truth lived with courage and love.

What began as a prayer in the night at the Table of Friendship in New York, at 3:00 in the morning, touched the Vatican and changed the lives of so many around the world. Imagine what God could do with your prayer today. And no wonder Tennyson rightly said that more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.