

3rd Sunday of Easter – Cycle A

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Acts 2:14, 22-33

Today's first reading tells of the formation of the early Church as we hear Peter address the people of the day of Pentecost. His address is in two parts: Part 1, which we do not hear today, explains that the messianic times foretold by the Prophet Joel have now arrived; today's reading is the second part of the address and it proclaims that Jesus of Nazareth, whom the Jews crucified, is the Messiah promised by God and eagerly awaited by the righteous of the Old Testament; it is he who has effected God's saving plan for mankind.

"Pentecost" means "the 50th day". It is one of three feasts mentioned in Exodus 23:14-17 where it is called simply the harvest festival, the feast of the first-fruits of the grain harvest. In Leviticus 23:15-21 the feast is reckoned by counting seven weeks from the beginning of the grain harvest; it is a day of sabbatical observance. As with the other two feasts mentioned in Exodus 23:14-17, it is a pilgrimage feast: *"three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord God"*. Jerusalem is crowded with pilgrims. The resurrected Jesus had spent forty days instructing His apostles and then ten days ago ascended after telling them *"not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for 'the promise of the Father... you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit'"* (Acts 1:4-5). The Holy Spirit has come upon them this day and now Peter, the chief apostle and spokesman for the group, addresses the crowd of pilgrims who are outside the upper room, attracted by the sound of the coming of the Spirit.

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed to them,

Notice the change worked in Peter by the Holy Spirit: he preaches and argues boldly whereas only some 50 days earlier he had trembled at the word of a servant girl. Notice that it is Peter who speaks for the whole group with no dissension from any of the other apostles.

"You who are Jews, indeed all of you staying in Jerusalem. Let this be known to you, and listen to my words. ²² You who are Israelites, hear these words. Jesus the Nazorean was a man commended to you by God with mighty deeds, wonders, and signs, which God worked through him in your midst, as you yourselves know.

The overall concern is to show that God is directing history at its every turn.

²³ This man, delivered up by the set plan and foreknowledge of God, you killed, using lawless men to crucify him.

God's fore-ordination of Jesus' death does not diminish the people's guilt. God triumphs through human actions rather than despite them.

24 But God raised him up, releasing him from the throes of death, because it was impossible for him to be held by it. 25 For David says of him:

Jewish tradition is that David wrote all the psalms. Psalm 16:8-11 is quoted; its only use in the New Testament. The tradition of Davidic authorship of the psalms and the divine pledge of David's everlasting dynasty (2 Samuel 7:12-16) play a key role in the Scripture proofs of Saint Luke's proclamation of what God has done in Christ for the salvation of men.

'I saw the Lord ever before me, with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed. 26 Therefore my heart has been glad and my tongue has exulted; my flesh, too, will dwell in hope, 27 because you will not abandon my soul to the netherworld, nor will you suffer your holy one to see corruption. 28 You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.' 29 My brothers, one can confidently say to you about the patriarch David that he died and was buried, and his tomb is in our midst to this day.

1 Kings 2:10 tells us that David is buried in Jerusalem. Since David has died, the psalm cannot apply to him. This argument is following a set pattern: (1) Scripture says; (2) the words apply either to the one speaking in the text or to another; (3) they do not apply to the speaker; (4) therefore they apply to another, namely Jesus. Similar patterns occur in Acts 8:30-35 and 13:35-37.

30 But since he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne,

The ideology of Davidic succession is quoted from Psalm 132:11-12 to indicate of whom David prophesied in the Psalm.

31 he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that neither was he abandoned to the netherworld nor did his flesh see corruption. 32 God raised this Jesus; of this we are all witnesses.

The statement of verse 24 is reaffirmed and a statement of apostolic witness is added.

33 Exalted at the right hand of God, he received the promise of the holy Spirit from the Father and poured it forth, as you (both) see and hear.

What we have here is Saint Peter, the masterful teacher, demonstrating that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah who was foretold by the prophets by reminding his listeners of our Lord's miracles (verse 22), as well as of His death (verse 23), resurrection (verses 24-32)

and glorious ascension (verse 33).

2nd Reading - 1 Peter 1:17-21

This week we delve a little farther into the 1st letter of Peter. Peter was originally called *Simeon* in Hebrew (Simon is the Greek form of the name). Jesus reamed him *Kepha* (Hebrew/Aramaic) or *Petros* (Greek), transliterated in some texts as Cephas. Simon Peter was a native of Bethsaida, a city of Galilee on the northeast shore of Lake Tiberius (Genesareth/Sea of Galilee). Like his father John and his brother Andrew, he was a fisherman. We know that he was married because Jesus healed his mother-in-law who was living in Capernaum (Matthew 8:14).

Today we hear Saint Peter call us to holiness. The Christian has attained the honor of being God's child, his son or daughter. Peter summarizes God's plan for man's salvation, which comes about in Christ: from all eternity it was God's design to save men through Christ; this design was made manifest "at the end of times"; when our Lord offered Himself as an expiation for the sins of men, and then rose from the dead and was glorified.

17 Now if you invoke as Father

Calling upon a father as witness is swearing an oath (*kaddush* in Hebrew) it is recognizing a covenant bond in which we are all children of God. The *Didache* (The Teaching of the 12 Apostles), a 1st century writing, tells us that the "Our Father" was recited three times a day.

him who judges impartially

It is true that the Lord our God is infinitely merciful, but He is also infinitely just: and there is a judgment, and He is the judge.

according to each one's works,

Divine sonship can never be taken as a kind of safe-conduct which allows us to be casual about our duties. Faith without works is dead (James 2:26).

conduct yourselves with reverence during the time of your sojourning, ¹⁸ realizing that you were ransomed from your futile conduct, handed on by your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold ¹⁹

The Jews could redeem their sacrifice by paying 15 to 20 per cent more than the cost of the animal. The animal sacrifice was not effective; although it could show contrition for sin, it could not gain absolution sufficient for entrance into heaven.

but with the precious blood of Christ

The sacrifice of Jesus is effective, it allows us to approach the Father and gain absolution for

our sins.

“If the unfortunate Jews observe the Sabbath in such a way that they do not dare to do any secular work on it, how much more should those who have been ‘redeemed, not with gold or silver, but with the precious blood of Christ,’ pay attention to their price and devote themselves to God on the day of His resurrection, thinking more diligently of the salvation of their souls?” [Caesar of Arles (A.D. 542), *Sermons*, 73,4]

as of a spotless unblemished lamb.

This is a Passover reference which carries over into the Eucharist. Just like the original Passover sacrifice, the sacrifice of the Eucharist must be eaten to be effective.

²⁰ He was known before the foundation of the world

God always knew what was going to be required, but He, in His infinite respect for our free will, let us come to this point in salvation history by our own deeds and actions.

but revealed in the final time for you, ²¹ who through him believe in God who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

The resurrection of Jesus is the basis of Christian faith and hope and is the main proof of Jesus’ divinity and His divine mission (see 1 Corinthians 15). The apostles were, first and foremost, witnesses of our Lord’s resurrection; and the proclamation of the resurrection was the core of apostolic catechesis. Jesus the Christ rose from the dead by His own power, the power of His divine person. The Saint Pius V Catechism points out that “We sometimes, it is true, read in Scripture that He was raised by the Father; but this refers to Him as man, just as those passages, on the other hand, which say that He rose by His own power relate to Him as God.”

The next verse reads “*Since you have purified yourselves by obedience to the truth for sincere mutual love, love one another intensely from a (pure) heart.*” Everything depends upon living the life of Christ.

Gospel - Luke 24:13-35

Last week we heard the account of Jesus’ first appearance to the disciples as recorded in the Gospel of John. It was at this appearance that He conferred the ability and responsibility to forgive sins to the apostles. Today’s gospel reading is the first appearance of Jesus away from the tomb as recorded in Luke’s gospel. There is a parallel account in Mark 16:12-13.

There are a number of differences which show up upon comparison of today’s gospel reading with the gospel reading of last week as we hear this week of the account of His appearance to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus:

- 1) The two men are not leaders of the community but represent all followers.
- 2) The two men are troubled and do not understand why Jesus was crucified.
- 3) At first they do not recognize Jesus.
- 4) The apostles seem to recognize Jesus but do not believe their senses.
- 5) After recognition, these two men do not hesitate to believe.
- 6) Once recognized, Jesus disappears.

¹³ Now that very day [the first day of the week]

As attested in Luke 24:1, this is the first Easter Sunday.

two of them

It has been suggested that these two may be part of the seventy-two (seventy) sent out in pairs in Luke 10:1.

were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus,

The location of the village is unknown today. The name means “hot spring”.

¹⁴ and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred.

The two have lost hope and have ceased to be journeying with Jesus. Their leader has been killed and they don't know what to do. The Lucan theme of journey is predominant as an image for discipleship.

¹⁵ And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.

Throughout his gospel Saint Luke plays on the theme of seeing. Now he articulates this theme as he tells how the risen Christ opens the eyes of disciples to see His true meaning in God's plan. But as this story narrates, the disciples' eyes are only fully opened after they have shown hospitality to a stranger.

¹⁷ He asked them, “What are you discussing as you walk along?” They stopped, looking downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas,

From Eusebius (A.D. 263-339) we learn that Cleopas is the brother of Joseph, Jesus' foster father and father of Symeon. Symeon succeeded James as Bishop of Jerusalem and after A.D. 70 led the Christians back to Jerusalem. *“After the martyrdom of James and the capture of Jerusalem which instantly followed, there is a firm tradition that those of the apostles and disciples of the Lord who were still alive assembled from all parts together with those who, humanly speaking, were kinsmen of the Lord – for most of them were still living. Then they all discussed together whom they should choose as a fit person to succeed James, and voted unanimously that Symeon, son of the Cleopas mentioned in the gospel narrative, was a fit person to occupy the throne of the Jerusalem see. He was, so it is said, a cousin of the Savior,*

for Hegesippus tells us that Cleopas was Joseph's brother." [Eusebius, *The History of The Church* (3.11)]. The names may not be important for salvation history, but the tradition brings out that the "brethren of Jesus", his close relatives, did not completely reject Him.

said to him in reply, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?"¹⁹ And he replied to them, "What sort of things?" They said to him, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,

At most, Jesus had impressed these men as the expected prophet. They never believed in Jesus' divinity.

²⁰ how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. ²¹ But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. ²² Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning ²³ and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive.

The faithful women disciples' proclamation of the Easter gospel is resisted and does not open their eyes of faith.

²⁴ Then some of those with us went to the tomb

Peter and John (John 20:3-10)

and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see."²⁵ And he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures.

Jesus begins His explanation with Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch (tradition ascribes authorship of these books to Moses). What does positively contribute to faith is Jesus' interpretation of His life as the fulfillment of all God's promises from one end of the Scriptures to the other.

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. ²⁹ But they urged him, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

Jesus was not play-acting, he really would have departed had He not been invited to stay.

³⁰ And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them.

This is Eucharistic terminology. *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* states “We need not maintain that Jesus consecrated the Eucharist.” – I say “baloney!” Jesus consecrated the Eucharist and in making Himself present in the Eucharist the two disciples saw the fulfillment of all the Old Testament covenants and prophecies as well as the New Testament promises. After all, this is what Jesus had just spent the day explaining to them. What a Bible study that must have been!

³¹ With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him,

The verb translated as “eyes were opened” occurs only eight times in the New Testament and in each case it always means a deeper understanding of revelation.

but he vanished from their sight. ³² Then they said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning (within us) while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?” ³³ So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem

Notice that the two disciples are not at all upset at the loss (again) of their leader. In fact, they are anxious to tell the apostles of their discovery. They have discovered Jesus’ Real Presence in the Eucharist! The person-to-person physical presence of a visible Jesus is no longer necessary because He is indeed risen and is present in the word and in the sacrament.

where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them ³⁴ who were saying, “The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!”

Jesus’ prayer (Luke 22:32) has been efficacious. Simon Peter has also been forgiven and is now empowered to strengthen his fellow Christians along the way.

³⁵ Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.