

7th 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 1:12-14

Our first reading for today occurs immediately after the account of the Ascension which we hear on Ascension Thursday.

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet,

The Mount of Olives. Some commentators derive from this text that the ascension occurred on the Mount of Olives.

which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away.

A negligible distance which one was allowed to travel on the Sabbath, about ½ mile

13 When they entered the city they went to the upper room where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.

The eleven are listed and this list agrees with Luke 6:14-16, less Judas the betrayer. The order has been changed with Peter, James and John listed first – it is these three about whom more is told in the book of the Acts of the Apostles.

14 All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer,

This is the first passage which tells of the spiritual life and devout practices of the disciples. Significantly, it places emphasis on prayer, in keeping with Jesus' own practice (see Matthew 6:5; 14:23; etc.).

together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

Here we see Mary as the spiritual center around which Jesus' intimate friends gather – tradition has meditated on this setting and found it to depict Our Lady's motherhood over the whole Church, both at the beginning and over the centuries.

2nd Reading - 1 Peter 4:13-16

Today completes our study of 1 Peter. After our Lord's ascension, Peter, without any debate or bickering, is the leading apostle; it is he who proposes and presides over the election of Matthias to take the office ("bishopric," as the King James Version calls it) of the

traitorous Judas, specifying the requirements for candidacy; he who delivers the first address to evangelize the people on the day of Pentecost; he who speaks out before the Sanhedrin to justify the apostles' preaching; he who condemns Ananias and Sapphira and also Simon the magician. Instructed by the Lord in a vision, he receives the first pagan family into the Church (that of Cornelius). And Saint Paul, after his conversion and despite having received the gospel in a revelation from Jesus, went up to Jerusalem around the year 39 to see Cephas (as he usually called him), and stayed with him for two weeks – a clear sign of the respect Saint Paul had for the man chosen by the Lord to be the visible head of His Church on earth.

The Jewish authorities, too, were aware of the leading place Peter had in the early Church, as can be seen from the fact that, around the year 43, Herod Agrippa I had him imprisoned with the intention of putting him to death. On that occasion the Church “made earnest prayer” to God for him (Acts 12:5), after which he was miraculously released from prison and “departed to another place” – probably Rome or Antioch. We do know that he presided at the Council of Jerusalem in the year 49 and was martyred in Rome under Nero (tradition is that he was crucified, head down) most probably in 67, which is when Saint Paul also died.

A very ancient tradition, supported by archaeological excavations, says that Saint Peter's tomb is under the altar of Saint Peter's Basilica.

In our final reading from this letter, we hear Saint Peter speak about the spiritual value of suffering unjust persecution.

13 But rejoice to the extent that you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice exultantly.

Romans 8:17 tells us that “we suffer with him in order to be also glorified with him”.

14 If you are insulted for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

God's Spirit is the source of glory and the pledge of future glory is regarded as resting on the suffering Church.

15 But let no one among you be made to suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as an intriguer.

The term translated as “intriguer” is a very rare Greek term indicating a person who meddles in another's business; a malefactor.

“Our suffering must not be like that of the thief on the cross, who suffered because he was a murderer, even though he himself confessed that Christ had done no wrong. Nor should we be like Ananias and Sapphira, who tried to steal what belonged to God. Even less should we imitate Simon Magus, who denounced the apostles to Nero and who tried to buy their gifts

with gold and silver.” [Saint Hilary of Arles (ca. A.D. 428), *Commentary on 1 Peter*]

16 But whoever is made to suffer as a Christian should not be ashamed but glorify God because of the name.

This does not mean that being a Christian was a public crime. The Christians being addressed here are not facing death but public condemnation for their belief. The term “Christian” occurs only here and in Acts 11:26 and 26:28. Acts 11:26 tells us that it was in Antioch that the followers of Jesus were first called “Christians”. Around the year 108 it was also in Antioch that the Church was first called “Catholic” and that was by Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch.

“If you suffer as a Christian, you have nothing to be ashamed of. Think of James the son of Zebedee or Stephen. However awful the trials you suffer may be, learn to glory in them, not to be upset by them. Christ’s glory is revealed in the Church when it suffers.” [Saint Hilary of Arles (ca. A.D. 428), *Commentary on 1 Peter*]

Gospel - John 17:1-11a

Again, our gospel reading occurs at the Last Supper. What we hear today is Jesus’ prayer for himself (verses 1 through 5) and for His disciples. Since the sixteenth century this has been called the “High Priestly Prayer”.

17:1 Jesus raised his eyes to heaven

The customary attitude of prayer (see John 11:41).

and said, “Father, the hour has come. Give glory to your son, so that your son may glorify you,

The “hour” of Jesus is that of His glorification: the crucifixion, death, and resurrection by which salvation is achieved. He has completed the work of “glorifying” the Father in giving eternal life through the Eucharist which has now been given to the apostles.

2 just as you gave him authority over all people, so that he may give eternal life to all you gave him.

This directs attention back to the affirmation that the Father has given the Son power to give life and to judge (John 5:20-27).

3 Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ.

We now have a definition of eternal life. To “know” is to experience and to accept commands by obedience – to accept the will of God and obey. To “do whatever He tells you”.

4 I glorified you on earth by accomplishing the work that you gave me to do.

The Son has glorified the Father by revealing Him perfectly in all the words and deeds of His life.

5 Now glorify me, Father, with you, with the glory that I had with you before the world began.

Now in turn the Father will glorify Him in the resurrection and ascension by which He will return to the glory that in His pre-incarnational state He has possessed from all eternity.

6 “I revealed your name to those whom you gave me out of the world.

In Semitic usage, “name” is equivalent to the person.

They belonged to you, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7 Now they know that everything you gave me is from you,

The disciples have come to a true recognition of the relation of the Son to the Father, of His character as Savior. To “know” doesn’t mean to perceive or be aware of, but reflects personal involvement in. Those whom the Father has given Him, the apostles, have been shown the Father and Jesus is now beginning His prayer for them.

8 because the words you gave to me I have given to them, and they accepted them and truly understood that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me. 9 I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for the ones you have given me,

It isn’t that Jesus is excluding from His prayers the world that God loves; the subject of this prayer is the apostles, the first Bishops of the Church, who must live in the world but be no part of it.

because they are yours, 10 and everything of mine is yours and everything of yours is mine, and I have been glorified in them.

The disciples have already glorified Jesus by their fidelity (verse 6). In view of the perspective of this prayer, Jesus is probably speaking of the future works of the disciples as already glorifying Him.

11a And now I will no longer be in the world, but they are in the world, while I am coming to you.

This is the reason for this prayer: They need the divine protection in an exceptional way, now that His visible presence is about to be removed from them.