

Seventh Sunday of Easter

May 24, 2020

Introduction

In these days between Ascension and Pentecost, we gather with the disciples in the upper room, waiting for the Spirit to transform the church around the world. In today's gospel Jesus prays for his followers and for their mission in his name. Amid religious, social, and economic divisions, we seek the unity that Jesus had with his Father. Made one in baptism, we go forth to live our faith in the world, eager for the unity that God intends for the whole human family.



Thanksgiving for Baptism

You may want to have a small bowl of water available to remind you of your baptism!

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Joined to Christ in the waters of baptism,

we are raised with him to new life.

Let us give thanks for the gift of baptism.

We give you thanks, O God,

for in the beginning you created us in your image

and planted us in a well-watered garden.

In the desert you promised pools of water for the parched,

and you gave us water from the rock.

When we did not know the way,

you sent the Good Shepherd to lead us to still waters.

At the cross, you watered us from Jesus' wounded side,

and on this day, you shower us again with the water of life.

We praise you for your salvation through water,

and for all water everywhere.

Bathe us in your forgiveness, grace, and love.

Satisfy the thirsty, and give us the life only you can give.

To you be given honor and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord

in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever. **Amen.**

Gathering Hymn

Crown Him with Many Crowns

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Prayer of the Day

O God of glory, your Son Jesus Christ suffered for us and ascended to your right hand. Unite us with Christ and each other in suffering and in joy, that all the world may be drawn into your bountiful presence, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Acts 1:6-14

Today's reading is part of the introduction to the narrative of the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost. These verses tell of the risen Lord's conversation with his disciples on the eve of his ascension, in which he promises that they will receive the power of the Holy Spirit.

Read the text [here](#).

Second Reading: 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11

Our faith in Christ does not make us immune from the scorn of others. Nevertheless, we are to resist the designs of evil when we experience disparagement from others because we trust God's grace will strengthen and guide us.

Read the text [here](#).

Gospel: John 17:1-11

On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus prays to his heavenly Father, asking that those who continue his work in this world will live in unity.

Read the text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

The connections between our current situation in life and these texts are so timely, it is almost overwhelming. The first reading tells of the risen Lord's conversation with his disciples on the eve of his ascension in which he promises that they will receive the power of the Holy Spirit. In verse 8 it says, "*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.*" Then in verse 9 it says, "*When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.*"

The lectionary tends to confuse chronology. Last week the gospel reading's setting was on the night of Jesus's arrest to be crucified. Jesus encouraged obedience to his commandments and promised the Spirit. The lectionary keeps with the promise of the Spirit from last week to this week.

I can't help but think how ironic it is that the members of the early church hid themselves away in their houses just like we are doing today. Of course, we are hiding for different reasons. For the early church, they were trying to evade persecution from the Roman Empire. The early church's controversial leader, Jesus, had been crucified, died, had risen, showed up on the Emmaus road, and was spending some time with the disciples. This included the promise of the Holy Spirit that would come to be with them after Jesus ascended into heaven.

Early members of the church knew that Jesus had overcome death, but to the government, I bet they were just glad that everything was settled as far as they knew. I'm sure to them it seemed that the Roman peace through Jesus's crucifixion had been restored again. Everybody had been put back in their place, and it seemed that *poof* the Christians were gone. Of course, we all know why we are in our houses. We are evading the coronavirus. In the Christian narrative, we have been behind the safety of lock and key before.

Personally, I have leaned on parts of our second reading in trying times in my life. Verse 7 says, "*Cast your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*" Verse 9 says, "*Resist [the devil], steadfast in your, for you know that your brothers and sisters and all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.*" Verse 10 says, "*After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you.*"

I can be an anxious person, so since a young age, I have tried to do just what the scripture says-- give my anxiety up in prayer to God, and this has helped to deepen my prayer life and my relationship with God. Obviously, I don't know what it was like to be persecuted as a member of the early church, but I do know what suffering looks like. Unfortunately, the entire world suffers as one in this pandemic.

I don't think we're called to suffer on purpose, to make us stronger, or take on Christ's pain with him, or to test our faith, or anything of that nature. Christ bore our sins upon the cross so that we would not have to suffer forever. One bible commentary notes that during times of unexpected suffering, Christians must be humbled to God, which means that they must give their anxieties to God. Christians behave this way according to the author of First Peter because God is not indifferent to suffering and in fact is *actively opposing* the evil that causes it. First Peter is not a celebration of suffering. It is a celebration of salvation in Christ. This reality that God is active in our world, and will bring conflict, and illness, and pain to an end one day allows the text to shift to blessing even in the midst of unexpected suffering.

This worldwide suffering is not a test from God, but it *can* be an opportunity for mission and Christian unity. That's what I hear in the gospel reading. Jesus, on the night before his crucifixion, prayed in the garden of Gethsemane to God, asking that those who continue his work in this world will live in unity.

Quick reminder: the readings from first Peter and John are not advocating works righteousness. We cannot do things to earn our salvation, because Jesus already took care of that on the cross. Our salvation is a free gift from God.

In John 17:9, Jesus prays to God for the disciples in all times and places, which includes us. Then in verse 11 he says, “*Now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world and I am coming to you. Holy Father protect them in your name that you have given me so that they may be one as we are one.*”

Right now, the world suffers as one. As the scattered body of Christ, we are held together through baptism and the love of God in Christ Jesus. Yes, continue to practice *physical* distancing, but now more than ever, we must unite as one in Christ, sent out into the world, to be the body of Christ, that is, the hands and feet of Jesus in the world, whatever that looks like today. We must be cautious yet loving at the same time.

I have witnessed abundance in this pandemic. Churches of many denominations have worked together and individually to gather food and items for families in dire need right now. This is the work of God in our community, and we have been a part of it. For every can, snack, and dollar that our churches have pooled together, we, through the help of the Spirit, are sustaining our neighbors. *This* is the kind of unity that John is talking about in our gospel reading today. I give thanks to you and to God for the work that is happening in our community even though we are in a global pandemic. Amen.

Hymn of the Day

Beautiful Savior

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Nicene Creed

We profess our faith with the whole church:

**We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God, begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.**

For us and for our salvation

**he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary
and became truly human.**

**For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.**

**On the third day he rose again in accordance with the scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

Uplifted by the promised hope of healing and resurrection, we join the people of God in all times and places in praying for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

O God, call your people to be one, as you are one. Unite your church in the truth of your gospel, the love of our neighbor, and the call to proclaim your reign to all people. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Breathe life into your creation. Guide your people as we explore the mysteries of the universe. We pray for the work of scientists and mathematicians whose skill enriches our understanding, especially those around the world who are working to identify the best treatments and a vaccine for COVID-19. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Make your justice known among the nations of the earth. Protect the vulnerable during this time; especially those who have lost their jobs and those putting themselves in harm's way to care for others and to provide essential services. Care for those who are in the paths of storms and flooding. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Come to the aid of your children. We pray for those engulfed in grief, those without supportive families, and for all who are isolated, powerless, or afraid, *and those we name now*; that all may rest their anxieties in your care. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give courage to all who embark on new ventures. We especially remember this day those who risked their lives to serve in our armed forces. Grant safety to those serving at home or abroad, and assure them of your never-failing strength.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give courage to all who embark on new ventures. We especially remember this day those who risked their lives to serve in our armed forces. Grant safety to those serving at home or abroad, and assure them of your never-failing strength.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Raise all your saints to eternal life. Until that day, we give you thanks for the faithful examples of those who have listened to your voice and now rest in you.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

With bold confidence in your love, almighty God, we place all for whom we pray into your eternal care; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Closing Hymn

A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing!

Listen and sing along [here](#).

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Today's reflection was written by Vicar Natalie Cook.