

SEVENTH SUNDAY

OF EASTER

YEAR A



FIRST READING

Acts 1:12-14

PSALM

Psalms 27:1, 4, 7-8

SECOND READING

1 Peter 4:13-16

GOSPEL

John 17:1-11

Prayer

Psalms 27:1, 4, 7-8

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple. Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!"

Your face, LORD, do I seek.

Reading the Word

Acts 1:12-14

The Apostles returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting them-

selves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

1 Peter 4:13-16

Rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker. Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name.

John 17:1-11

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me

to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And 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.

*Scripture quotations from
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Hearing the Word

“An Expectant Interlude”

The liturgy of this last Sunday before Pentecost draws our attention to the situation of expectant waiting, which is often a prelude to a new future, but which also requires the right focus and approach, in order to be constructive, rather than destructive.

The reading from the book of Acts shows Jesus' followers caught up between two important events – Jesus' ascension and Pentecost. After Jesus' departure, the eleven apostles returned to Jerusalem, where they gathered with the women followers of Jesus, and with his immediate family – his mother Mary and his brothers. This would be the core group with which the Christian movement would begin.

While waiting in suspense for what would come next, they were not idle, or grieving, or disheartened. Rather, they waited for the promised Holy Spirit, devoted to ardent and constant prayer. This prayer created a unity among them, making them a community that would later be described as single minded in their devotion to the apostolic mission of the Church. Prayer also kept them in contact with God, thus animating their hopes and expectations for the beginning of their own mission in the world. These future apostles and evangelizers used their time of waiting well, preparing for the task ahead through prayer.

The second reading speaks of waiting in the broader context of the believers' final des-

tiny. The dominant theme of 1 Peter is that of Christian suffering, which, in today's passage, is set in the context of waiting for Christ's return at the end of time. The author begins with a rather startling call for rejoicing on account of sufferings. However, he immediately specifies these sufferings as those which believers share with Christ. The occasion for joy is the believers' co-suffering with Christ, in view of sharing his glory when he returns.

The author proceeds to distinguish carefully between Christian suffering, and a just punishment for wrongdoings. Suffering that comes as a result of perpetrating crimes or causing disorder carries no benefit whatsoever, and no Christian should do anything to merit it. Salvific suffering comes upon believers because of “the name of Christ” which they bear. Their union with Christ comes through the Holy Spirit who fills them with God's glory, that is with God's presence. This presence and their adherence to Christ shapes their lives and behaviour. However, these unique beliefs and characteristic lifestyle also set them at odds with pagan society, singling them out for exclusion, harassment, ridicule and even violence. This type of affliction, caused by their adherence to faith, makes them co-sharers with Christ.

The author sees such Christian suffering as one of the signs of believers' union with Christ, and a foundation for their future vindication and glory. Such a perspective on the troubling experience of suffering aims to strengthen the

believers' resolve to face their afflictions as they expectantly await their Lord and Savior's return.

The Gospel passage contains a part of Jesus' prayer offered at the end of his extensive Last Supper discourse, and right before entering his passion. This text is, therefore, a prayer and Jesus' testament, or a farewell discourse delivered at a turning point in his life.

First, Jesus prays for himself, focusing on the theme of glory and glorification. These concepts have multiple meanings in the Scriptures. Frequently, glory refers to God's grandeur and holiness (cf. Ps 8:1), or to some perceptible manifestation of the holy God whom people cannot see directly (cf. Exod 24:16). In John's Gospel, these concepts when applied specifically to Jesus refer to his divine identity as God's unique Son (John 1:14) and to “the hour of glorification” (cf. John 13:1). This “hour” consists in Jesus' crucifixion, death, and resurrection. It is the moment of victory over death and Jesus' return to God.

In his prayer Jesus first prays for “mutual glorification” – that God would glorify the Son so the Son might glorify the Father. Jesus would glorify God through his death and resurrection which would constitute the completion of God's work that Jesus came to accomplish. However, glorification of the Father consisted also in making God known to his disciples. Jesus had already accomplished this task successfully by revealing God in his person. In Jesus, the disciples perceived God – they came

to see “God’s glory” – because “they have believed that you sent me”.

The glorification of the Son also contains a hidden allusion to Jesus’ death and his return to the heavenly world as Jesus states, “glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.” Having completed his mission of manifesting God in his own person, Jesus asks to be lifted up to God’s presence, to take on again the kind of divine existence which he had from eternity, and which he set aside when he assumed human flesh.

In the second part of his prayer Jesus prays for his disciples, to whom he made God’s name known. They accepted Jesus’ revelation and teaching to the point of “knowing” that Jesus came from God, and that his teaching transmitted the message of God himself. Through this knowledge the disciples came to belong to God and entered into a unique union with him. They also accepted and believed that Jesus was the true and credible embodiment of God in human form. This faith made Jesus “glorified in them”, which means that they truly came to see divine presence in him. These complex statements define the disciples as people who have been drawn to God through their contact and acceptance of Jesus as God’s truthful and credible representation, and the one who reveals him in the world.

In the final part of the prayer, Jesus speaks of the new situation that the disciples will soon face. Jesus is about to depart

from this world, and they will be left to carry on his mission of revealing God to the world. In John’s Gospel, “the world” usually signifies those who reject Jesus as God’s Son, and are hostile to his followers; “the world” for John is usually “the unbelieving world”. The disciples will face this unbelieving world, and their faith and union with God will be threatened. In view of this, Jesus requests that God protects the disciples “in his name”, which is a request for protection of their faith and commitment to the God they reached through Jesus’ teaching.

Finally, Jesus prays that the disciples be “one”. This is a prayer for unity which would reflect the unity between the Father and the Son. Such unity would not only maintain the cohesion among the community members but would also offer the unbelieving world a glimpse of the divine harmony manifested among the faithful. Jesus’ prayer for the protection of faith and unity teaches the disciples that these are to be their chief concerns as they begin their long independent mission.

The liturgy of the seventh Sunday of Easter points to an expectant interlude, or pause, often experienced between crucial events in salvation history. The earliest followers of Jesus faced such a time waiting for Pentecost, and used that time well, persevering in prayer. 1 Peter likens Christian life to a pause when believers await Jesus’ return; a waiting period made all the more expectant by the suffering that the life of faith often entails.

Jesus delivered his prayer for the disciples at the moment of transition between his earthly mission and his return to God’s glory. He prayed for the protection of faith and unity among his followers, knowing that maintaining these will keep them faithful and successful in their apostolic mission. These various aspects of expectant waiting disclosed in today’s readings correspond well to the sentiments shared by believers across the centuries, those also reflected in the words of the Psalmist, “Come,” my heart says, ‘seek his face!’ Your face, Lord, do I seek.”

Listening to the Word of God

The time of waiting in any given situation can easily be misconstrued as waste of time. For those who are hyperactive, waiting is a burdensome and unpleasant penance. However, when we choose to wait with and upon the Lord, we discover an inherent value in the significant pauses and interludes of life. In our walk of faith, the period of waiting is part of an important process preceding major life-changing events. In the words of John Ortberg, “waiting is not just something we have to do until we get what we want. Waiting is part of the process of becoming what God wants us to be”. When life’s interludes are welcomed as important moments in the chain of events of one’s life, the value of life does not depreciate; it rather appreciates. In the end, a person experiences wholesome change that positively impacts the direction of their life.

The disciples journeyed with Jesus during his public ministry. They witnessed his death and resurrection and watched the closing of an important chapter of salvation history when he ascended into heaven. In writing a story book, that last event of the ministry of Jesus on earth may qualify as a perfect ending – mission accomplished! However, the history of salvation does not end in that fashion. Another important chapter was destined to open with the descent of the Holy Spirit. Between these two chapters, there is an interlude characterized by waiting. This waiting was not passive. Indeed, waiting that yields fruit is active in character. It was an interval spent in intense prayer.

It is said, “Anything worth having is worth waiting for”. This proverb suggests that what we decide to wait for is of great value to us. We do not wait for something worthless, but for what we value and cherish. What we wait for discloses what we truly desire. A fisherman would cast his net and wait patiently to catch some fish. A farmer would plant seeds and wait for the time of harvest. In our relationship with the Lord, there will always be times of waiting, a period when nothing appears to be happening although something is happening. Good things do not come in a rush; they take time. What we wait for will come our way provided we know what we are waiting for.

As we gradually gather momentum to celebrate the outpouring and indwelling of

the Holy Spirit in our hearts, let us choose to spend quality time in prayer just as the disciples of Jesus did. Now is the time to intensify our prayers as individuals and as a community. It may take the form of a novena to the Holy Spirit, or ejaculatory prayers to the Holy Spirit. Ideally, during this period in the liturgical life of the Church, our bible and faith sharing will be centered on the Spirit.

This is the hour when holding on to the promise of the Lord, we pray unceasingly for a diffusion of the graces of the Lord upon us as he wills it.

Proverb

“Any-
thing
worth
having
is worth
waiting
for”

Action

Self-examination

Do I have any devotion to the Holy Spirit? Am I aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit in my life?

Am I cultivating an expectant faith by means of prayer in anticipation of the celebration of Pentecost?

Response to God

I will spend this time of waiting for Pentecost spending some time daily in complete silence. My only prayer will be, “O Lord, let me hear you and feel your presence.”

Response to your World

During this week before Pentecost I will take keen interest in what Sacred Scripture has to say about the Holy Spirit and prayerfully listen to the teachings about the Holy Spirit.

We will creatively organize prayer services dedicated to the Holy Spirit and invite friends and loved ones to participate.

Prayer

“Breathe into me, Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy. Move in me,

Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.

Attract my heart, Holy Spirit, that I may love only what is holy.

Strengthen me, Holy Spirit, that I may defend all that is holy.

Protect me, Holy Spirit, that I may always be holy. Amen”

(Saint Augustine)