

Fifth Sunday of Easter – May 14, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Acts 6:1-7

As the number of disciples continued to grow, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. So the Twelve called together the community of the disciples and said, "It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to serve at table. Brothers, select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint to this task, whereas we shall devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." The proposal was acceptable to the whole community, so they chose Stephen, a man filled with faith and the Holy Spirit, also Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas of Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid hands on them. The word of God continued to spread, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly; even a large group of priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

Psalm: Ps 33:1-2, 4-5, 18-19

R. (22) Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Exult, you just, in the LORD;
praise from the upright is fitting.
Give thanks to the LORD on the harp;
with the ten-stringed lyre chant his praises.

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Upright is the word of the LORD,
and all his works are trustworthy.
He loves justice and right;
of the kindness of the LORD the earth is full.

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

See, the eyes of the LORD are upon those who fear him,
upon those who hope for his kindness,
to deliver them from death
and preserve them in spite of famine.

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 2:4-9

Beloved: Come to him, a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God, and, like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it says in Scripture: Behold, I am laying a stone in Zion, a

cornerstone, chosen and precious, and whoever believes in it shall not be put to shame. Therefore, its value is for you who have faith, but for those without faith: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, a stone that will make people stumble, and a rock that will make them fall. They stumble by disobeying the word, as is their destiny. You are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises" of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Gospel: John 14:1-12

Jesus said to his disciples: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be. Where I am going you know the way." Thomas said to him, "Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him." Philip said to him, "Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works themselves. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father."



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

The Gospel for Sunday has a touching story about Jesus and the disciples. He is helping them get ready for his suffering and death. They are stunned. Once he asked if they were going to leave him, as many others had. Peter said, "Where would we go? You have the words of eternal life." Now the situation is reversed. So he says a simple thing. "Do not let your hearts be troubled by this. You have faith in God, have faith also in me." The straightforward meaning of this directive is, you know how to trust; you do it with God. So use some of that kind of trust with me. Good enough, and yet there is a much deeper meaning. He is saying in effect, "I, Jesus, am in complete union with the Father. I am a member of the Trinity. I am a revelation of everything that the Father is. When you trust the Father you are trusting me in the very same act. It goes right over their heads, as too often it does ours. So Jesus, the compassionate, tries an illustration. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I ever have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself.

In my Father's house there are many dwelling places.

A nifty image. A physical place, where we can all be together again. He will come back and get us. Who could misunderstand this? The apostles could, and did. Fear and grief blocked it. Jesus tries a different approach. "Where I am going you know the way." Thomas explains the practical difficulty with such a statement (this is Doubting Thomas, whose heart couldn't take the risk of trusting without facts): "*Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?*" In today's language we would probably phrase it more rudely: "Well, duh! 'The way' depends on where you are going. Name the town and we will get there before you." Thomas, typically, has missed the deeper meaning. Jesus had often referred to himself as "the way," as in "I am the way, the truth, and the life." "You can know the way to the Father because I am The Way." It is a beautiful depth of truth. But it does not work. Philip cuts to the chase: "This idea is much too fancy. Just show us the Father, and that will be enough for us." Shocking. Philip has uttered a masterpiece of practical misunderstanding. Jesus, now shocked too, says, "Have I been with you so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me." This is exactly the nuance that their shaken souls could not look at, the oneness of Trinitarian presence. God's love has been incarnated. It can never leave us, not really, not even to go to some far-away, roomy house. God is in Jesus and Jesus is in the world and he sends his Spirit to show us The Way. Let the apostles look high and low for their "practical" answer. Underneath the natural, pragmatic, practical world there exists a vast, quiet grandeur: God's infinitely loving presence.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. What was the Hellenists' complaint against the Hebrews? Did the twelve decide to neglect prayer and ministry of the word in order to help them? What do you do when you see neglected people? How did the good works of this community build faith? Does that have an effect today?
2. St. Peter says that you are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own." Do you therefore "announce the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light"? Do you do this regularly? Sometimes? With words? With works?
3. The disciples didn't know where Jesus was going and certainly did not want him to leave. Can you relate to this desire to be with the people you love? How is human love a reflection of divine love or a participation in it?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Almighty ever-living God, constantly accomplish the Paschal Mystery within us, that those you were pleased to make new in Holy Baptism may, under your protective care, bear much fruit and come to the joys of life eternal. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen