

## Sixth Sunday of Easter – May 6, 2018 – Good Shepherd Parish

### Scripture Reading: Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48

When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and, falling at his feet, paid him homage. Peter, however, raised him up, saying, "Get up. I myself am also a human being." Then Peter proceeded to speak and said, "In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him."

While Peter was still speaking these things, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the word. The circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit should have been poured out on the Gentiles also, for they could hear them speaking in tongues and glorifying God. Then Peter responded, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit even as we have?" He ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

### Psalm: Ps 98:1, 2-3, 3-4

R. (cf. 2b) The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.

Sing to the LORD a new song,  
for he has done wondrous deeds;  
his right hand has won victory for him,  
his holy arm.

R. The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.

The LORD has made his salvation known:  
in the sight of the nations he has revealed his justice.  
He has remembered his kindness and his faithfulness  
toward the house of Israel.

R. The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.

All the ends of the earth have seen  
the salvation by our God.  
Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands;  
break into song; sing praise.

R. The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.

### Scripture Reading: 1 John 4:7-10

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love. In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins.

### Gospel: John 15:9-17

Jesus said to his disciples: "As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love.

"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy might be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another."



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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**

Imagine the emotional turmoil inside the disciples. •*First he was here then he was gone.* They had lived with Jesus in his public life and they had loved it. Surely they thought it would last forever. But abruptly he was gone. They were not at all prepared for the enormity of his torture and killing, the destruction of their lives, of their friend and their Lord. Gone, gone, gone, gone. •*Then he was here again.* We know how hard his resurrection was for the apostles. They doubted it and rejected it, even as the women welcomed it with full hearts. He appeared many times and kindly helped his followers to accept the fact that he was alive again. •*And then he was gone for good.* When they had gotten used to his new presence, guess what. The Ascension took place. \*Gone gone, gone. This presents the obvious question. Does the story really end with Jesus “gone,” ascended to heaven? The point of God's taking flesh had been to show how completely present he always is to us, living in our material world. So now has he absented himself forever by ascending? Are we back to where we started?

You and I must really look for the answer, because it contains the full Christian reality. We can do it using the readings for this Sunday. The First Reading is a continuation of Jesus' frequent predictions about sending the Holy Spirit (Paraclete, Teacher, Comforter) to us after he has ascended to the Father. All who believe and who open their hearts will receive the Spirit. Stay with this line of reasoning. What is the Spirit? Is it simply a dose of “grace” that we receive or earn in order to be holy? Or that Jesus and the Father send to give us a break? Or a “help”? Or some kind of power coming from God? None of these. Listen well: the Holy Spirit is: God. Not a representative of God, not a dove that descends on us, not even a point of fire over our heads. It is the complete, true reality of God. And it is marked by Jesus' entire life, death and resurrection, even as the Godhead is. This Spirit quietly makes us able to say yes to faith, not by brutalizing us or overriding us but by inviting us. The Second Reading and the Gospel are all about what your present writer wants to call “respectful love.” I define respectful love as that which never over-powers us but always respects our choice. Rather than a dictator, the Spirit wants to be a companion in our lives, respecting our self, not contradicting it. Jesus is with us, by means of his own Spirit within us. He hopes we will accept the offer of his Spirit. If we do, our souls will mingle with God's own reality and we will become a new body for the incarnate God. We are then called the “Mystical Body of Christ on earth.” You reply, “well great, but why am I so weak in belief, so far from Christ, so prone to sin? This Holy Spirit must be pretty anemic.” No, and here again is the reason. The Spirit always waits, waits, waits for us to receive life. Jesus is not gone, he is knocking at our inner door. We can say no. But we can also say yes with our lives. Through respectful love.

\*The Church provides an embarrassment of richness in the readings this week. Some few dioceses (the ecclesiastical provinces of Boston, Hartford, New York, Newark, Philadelphia, and Omaha) celebrate the feast of Ascension on Thursday, and therefore on Sunday will use the readings from the Seventh Sunday of Easter. Most others have the Ascension feast on Sunday and use the Ascension readings instead of those from the Seventh Sunday. In either case there are a number of possible second readings for Ascension. So let us simply talk here about the Ascension itself.

### **INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING**

1. Are there some areas that are off limits or do you invite the Holy Spirit into every part of your life?
2. How was “the love of God revealed to us?” Had Jesus not come into the world, what would you know about God?
3. The one thing Jesus asks of us is that we love our neighbor. How would you rate this assignment on a “difficulty” scale from 1-10? Explain. What gift (First Reading) does God give you to help with this assignment?)

### **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:

Grant, almighty God, that we may celebrate with heartfelt devotion these days of joy, which we keep in honor of the risen Lord, and that what we relive in remembrance we may always hold to in what we do. 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.