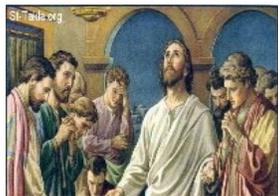


The Seventh Sunday of Easter

May 28, 2017

Saint Mary of the Assumption Parish



Today's Scriptures

For the last two Sundays the Gospel has been taken from Jesus' final discourse at the Last Supper, as recorded in John's Gospel. When Jesus concluded his discussion with his disciples, he prayed. Today's Gospel contains excerpts of this prayer, often called the high priestly prayer of Jesus. It is a prayer made on the eve of Jesus' passion, when Jesus offered all that he had done and all that he was about to accomplish through his death and resurrection to the Father, for his glory.

Throughout the prayer, Jesus frequently used the word "glory." The Hebrew Scriptures were full of references to God's glory as the way God's presence, character, and holiness was revealed and made known. Jesus prayed that the Father would be glorified by all he had done on his behalf. He prayed that God would be glorified in what he was about to do as he went through his passion, death and resurrection. He prayed that God would glorify him so that the world would recognize that he had been sent by the Father to restore eternal life to those who believed in him.

Jesus also prayed for those who had heard his word and had believed in him. Jesus believed that his disciples were given to him by the Father. These were the ones who would remain in the world when he was gone and who would carry on his saving work. Because Jesus knew that their faith would be badly shaken in the days to come, he prayed that they would glorify Jesus and the Father. From now on, they would be the ones to make the Jesus and the Father known to the world.

The First Reading gives us a glimpse of these disciples after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. They had witnessed a glorified Jesus after his resurrection and had been commissioned by him to continue to share the Gospel throughout the world. Then they witnessed Jesus being taken into heaven. They returned to the place where they had been staying and devoted themselves to prayer as they awaited the promised outpouring of God's Spirit. When the Spirit came to them at Pentecost, they would leave there to continue the work of Jesus. They would indeed glorify Jesus and the Father as they began to build the Church.

By the time 1 Peter was written, the Church was suffering under persecution from religious and civil enemies. The writer consoled the suffering community, reminding them that their sufferings was a share of Jesus' own suffering, and one day, when Jesus was fully revealed in all his glory, they would be rejoicing with him. The writer believed that when Christians are insulted for their belief in Jesus, they are blessed, because the glory of God rests on them. Jesus and the Father are made known to the world through their patient suffering.

Sunday Readings and Backgrounds

Reading I: Acts 1:12-14

They were all gathered in the upper room, waiting.

- Today's first reading refers to a time when the early Christians were "in-between" their experience of Jesus' presence with them and their experience of the promised Holy Spirit.
- The Apostles, Mary, and other believers return to Jerusalem after the death of Jesus.
- They are strengthened as a community through support of one another and prayer.

Responsorial Psalm: Ps. 27: 1, 4, 7-8.

I believe I shall see the good things of the Lord in the land of the living.

Reading II: Peter 4:13-16

If you suffer for something, let it be for Christ.

- In the second reading, Christians living in the time "between" Pentecost and the second coming of Jesus at the end of time are reminded that their conduct should promote unity and harmony rather than destroy it.
- At the time this letter was written, the Christian community was finding it hard to endure persecution.
- Peter warns them that following Christ might result in hardships, but that any suffering in God's name will lead to future glory.

Gospel: John 17:1-11a

Jesus prays to his Father.

- Today's Gospel is part of Jesus' Last Supper discourse. Jesus' address is not to the disciples but to the Father.
- In today's passage, Jesus prays for himself, for the disciples and for all future believers, as he approaches his death.
- For the disciples, still in this world, Jesus prays that they will be united in a unity on earth as close as the unity between him and the Father.

Reprinted with permission. LifelongCatechesis.OSV.com.



A God-Sized Vision

When I was in college we celebrated a Holy Thursday liturgy that culminated in a fantastic light show on the ceiling. At first it was subtle, and then as vocal music yielded to instrumental, we all began to notice the intertwining, dancing lights above our heads. It must have lasted almost a minute when suddenly a voice boomed out “Why are you standing there looking up? Go tell the world what you have seen!” It was a fabulous “gotcha” moment — and the message stayed with us.

Getting down to the mission is surely part of the message here; the scene reminds us of the transfiguration when Jesus told Peter that they didn’t have time to camp out on the mountain, there was work to do and much to learn. Nevertheless, we could imagine an alternative scene at the end of the Ascension story. What if one or two of the disciples had the nerve to answer back when the angels spoke? (We can tell by their outfits that they were both angels.) Speaking back is not out of the question. After all, at the very beginning of the Gospel of Luke, Mary questioned an angel — as did Zachariah with less positive results.

A Peter or Martha might have said, “He told us it’s not yet time! We’re supposed to stick around for whatever’s coming next.” Others might have gotten the courage to chime in: “Why are we looking up? Because we don’t know what’s about to happen!” “Where else are we supposed to look? We need to see beyond this spot where our feet are sinking in the mud of fear and confusion. All around us we see nothing but signs of all that went wrong in the past few weeks.”

If there were anyone on the side of the angels, it might have been Mary Magdalene. Having understood that she couldn’t cling to Jesus, she could have encouraged the rest: “Come on guys, I know you can’t just take it from me, but he said he would remain with us ... Don’t you get it? This is just like when Elijah went off in the fiery chariot ... he left Elisha with a double dose of his spirit. So, for once, let’s try doing what he told us!”

While that’s imaginary, Luke’s story does portray the tension between looking heavenward and getting down

to earth. Thinking about it, we can well imagine how unprepared those disciples must have felt for their mission.

The Letter to the Ephesians offers a description of the gifts the disciples needed to move forward. In today’s selection from that letter we hear the prayer “May the God of our Lord ... give you a Spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him. May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened that you may know the hope that belongs to his call ... the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe.” What a prayer for semi-willing, mostly confused disciples!

That prayer begins by grounding us in our faith, reminding us that the will of God the Father, “our Lord,” and the Spirit is always for our good. When it asks for a “Spirit of wisdom and revelation,” it opens us to the Spirit that gives us the ability to read the signs of the times, to recognize how God is luring us forward through the people and events of our days. To pray that “the eyes of our hearts be enlightened” pleads for a God-sized vision, for hope that will go further than all our imaginations put together.

We can celebrate the Ascension as an invitation to imagination that leads us to ask for such a blessing. We are invited to stand with the disciples who heard the promise, who knew they wouldn’t see Jesus anymore but who were still charged with carrying on his mission. Like them, we must face the very real dispiriting events of our times, the circumstances that cannot and should not be ignored. We may share their desire to simply stand, looking heavenward for a solution, but we will also hear angels or prophets who remind us that prayer is only one part of the equation.

If we have the audacity and courage to pray for the blessings of wisdom, revelation, knowledge of God, enlightened hearts and Christian hope, we will be impelled to action. The really good news is that Christ has promised that as we go to the ends of the earth, he will be with us until the end of the ages.

Mary McGlone, Celebration Magazine, May 2017. Reprinted with permission.