

5 Easter Year A Readings and Commentary

Summary by Dale J. Sieverding: The proclamation from the Acts of the Apostles continues with the account of the community's growth and need for ministers of service for the poor. The choosing of 7 people to "serve at table" indicates a diaconal ministry for taking care of the poor so the apostles could focus on the ministry of proclamation and preaching. Note that the prayer and the laying on of hands, an early witness to what would become a developed ordination ritual, is here present in the biblical account.

The selection from the First Letter of Peter offers the kernel of what would become a developed understanding of the people as a royal priesthood and holy nation that would be set apart to give praise and glory to God. The author of this epistle, delineates for the fledgling first century Church its purpose of worship to God.

The selection from the fourth evangelist is part of the farewell discourse of Jesus situated after the last supper. Jesus assures the disciples that he is "the way, the truth and the life" and that he is showing the disciples (and community) the way to God the Father. This text indicates that Jesus is the *only* way to come to knowledge and communion with God. John is writing late in the first century, a generation or more removed from the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. He encourages the disciples (community) not to lose heart but to persevere and grow in knowledge of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

For the third millennium followers of Jesus, encouragement is given to take up the ministry of service to a broken world and be signs and symbols of Christ's presence by our care for one another and those who have no voice.

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First Reading Acts 6:1-7

They chose seven men filled with the Spirit.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

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.

The word of the Lord.

Commentary Acts 6:1-7 by Deacon Owen Cummings: Since the time of Bishop Irenaeus of Lyons in the late 2nd century, the seven "spiritual and prudent men" of this passage have been considered deacons. Three things emerge with clarity about these men and their ministry. First, the community is involved in their selection. The Twelve say, "Look around among your number, brothers, for seven men..." The close link between the community and the Seven is very clear. Their character will be known to the community who will recognize, as it were, their ministerial instinct. Second, we see the Twelve exercising real pastoral leadership here. They see a pressing pastoral need, that the Greek speaking widows were not being ministered to adequately, and they make a pastoral proposal to meet that need. They evaluate the situation and take a pastoral initiative which issues in the choice of the Seven. Third, with the exception of Stephen and Philip we know nothing about these men apart from their names. This is probably how they would wish it. Service of the Lord in his Church is the all important thing, not the achieved fame of the ministers. The net result could not be more clearly stated: "The word of God continued to spread," and discipleship flourished. In other words, the pastoral initiative of the Twelve in commissioning the Seven was a great success. The Church's work advanced. This is a solid Easter motif. The message of the Lord's Resurrection finds expression in the flourishing mission of the Church.

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

℟(22) Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.
Or: **℟**Alleluia.

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.

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.

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.

Commentary Psalm 33:1-2, 4-5, 18-19 by John Paul Heil:

Main Theme: We praise and thank the God will deliver us from death. A favorite theme in the biblical tradition, especially in the Psalms, is that of the innocently suffering "just one"--the person who, despite sincerely striving to live justly and uprightly in accord with God's covenantal will and trying to work for justice in the world, often experiences difficulties, rejection, and even death from the hands of oppressors. Today's responsorial from Psalm 33 exhorts us, who are called to be "just ones" who work for justice, to praise and give thanks to the Lord God in whom we place our faith as "just ones." We are to thank and praise the Lord God not only "on the harp" but with "the ten-stringed lyre." In other words, we are to go all out--pull out all the stops--in thanking God in advance of what he will do for us. This God is worthy of our perseverance in faith because his word is upright and "all his works are trustworthy." God loves the justice and right that we as "just ones" are striving to bring about. As "just ones" we can confidently place our hope in God to deliver us from death--a hope reinforced by God's deliverance of Jesus, the suffering just one, by raising him from the dead.

Second Reading 1 Peter 2:4-9

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood.

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Peter

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,*

and

*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.

The word of the Lord

Commentary 1 Peter 2:4-9 by Deacon Owen Cummings: It is thought by many New Testament scholars that the first Letter of Peter is in fact a baptismal homily from the late first century, adapted as a kind of encyclical letter to the churches of Asia Minor [see 1:1]. The reason for this is not only the many references to baptism but also the baptismal "feel" of the entire text. It is encouraging and bold as it

addresses the Christian community. The opening sentences refer to the newly baptized as the true Temple. Everyone in antiquity, pagan as well as Jew, had an understanding of the temple as the dwelling place of the gods. Now Peter, either the historical Peter or perhaps Silvanus his secretary, is saying to the newly baptized, and, therefore, to us, "You are the Temple. God-in-Christ has taken up his dwelling place in you." Hence the newly baptized, and we, are "living stones," "an edifice of spirit." Then we come to that marvelous verse 9: "You are a chosen race..." On the surface it may sound somewhat exclusive: the Church is chosen and holy, and by implication others are not. That would miss the meaning. The Church, the newly baptized and ourselves, are called to proclaim through our words and actions and moral performance that all are chosen by God. The quality of baptized life in Christ is to be such as to attract and to persuade others that God has no less chosen them. In that sense, no remains "unchosen" by God. Baptized life proclaims that.

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Gospel Acclamation John 14:6

✠ Alleluia, alleluia.

I am the way, the truth and the life, says the Lord;
no one comes to the Father, except through me.

Gospel John 14:1-12

I am the way and the truth and the life.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

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."

The Gospel of the Lord

Lectionary for Mass in the Dioceses of the United States of America, volume I Copyright © 1970, 1997, 1998 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Commentary John 14:1-12 by Fr. Damien Dougherty, O.F.M.:

Jesus glorifies the Father with his obedience right up to death on the cross. The Father, on his part, glorifies the Son by sustaining him so as to accomplish the work that had been requested of him and by associating him through the resurrection and exaltation to his own, eternal glory. At this point, Jesus' colloquium with the disciples begins and throughout these farewell discourses, Jesus makes a revelation that cannot be comprehended by all but only by believers.

In responding to Thomas, Jesus asserts: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me." And, in answer to Philip's request for a demonstration of the Father, Jesus deepens his revelation. These very words complete the manifestation that Jesus

has progressively given up until now. To see the Son is to see the Father; that means that whoever believes sees within the love of the Son who dies in order to save, the very love of the Father who offers the life of his own Son. To put it in another way: within the Son who offers himself spontaneously to death the Father is revealed who offers his own life in order to save. Now Jesus will take it a step further to complete the revelation of the Trinity by an explication of the role of the Paraclete whose presence will enable the believers to comprehend the unity of the Son with the Father and to experience both within their own lives.

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