

6 Easter Year A Readings and Commentary

Summary by Dale J. Sieverding: The scriptures of this Sunday mark a turn in the celebration of the Easter Season. We begin to focus on the promise of the Holy Spirit. In the selection from Acts, after the people of Samaria are baptized “in the name of Jesus” and accept the word of God, apostles are sent to pray over them so they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Three elements are indicated as necessary for living lives of faith: hearing and accepting the word of God; baptism with water; and the prayer for the Holy Spirit.

The selection from the First Letter of Peter seems to speak to a community that is undergoing trials or persecution for their faith. The sacred writer indicates to the community what is meant by being one with Jesus in his suffering, death and resurrection. Instead of reacting to violence with violence, the community is encouraged to join their sufferings to the suffering of Christ, and thus enter into redemptive suffering to be made holy and grow in faith. Christians may suffer for doing good, but they will grow in the Spirit the more they enter into the paschal mystery of suffering.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus promises to send the apostles (and community) the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide them on their Christian journey and strengthen them in time of adversity. The evangelist encourages those who may have become disillusioned with the fact that Jesus had not returned in glory with salvation for all. This part of the farewell discourse of Jesus is intended to give hope and strength to the believers, and give confidence to the doubters.

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First Reading Acts 8:5-8, 14-17

Peter and John laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

Philip went down to the city of Samaria
and proclaimed the Christ to them.
With one accord, the crowds paid attention to what was said by Philip
when they heard it and saw the signs he was doing.
For unclean spirits, crying out in a loud voice,
came out of many possessed people,
and many paralyzed or crippled people were cured.
There was great joy in that city.

Now when the apostles in Jerusalem
heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God,
they sent them Peter and John,
who went down and prayed for them,
that they might receive the Holy Spirit,
for it had not yet fallen upon any of them;
they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
Then they laid hands on them
and they received the Holy Spirit.

The word of the Lord

Acts 8:5-8, 14-17

Commentary by Fr. Eugene Hensell, OSB: Philip was one of the seven Hellenists (Jews and Jewish Christians who speak only in Greek) chosen to serve the community in a wide variety of ministerial tasks (Acts 6:1-7). He is the one who evangelizes Samaria (Acts 8:5-8). His method of evangelization is modeled on that of Jesus. He proclaims the message of the gospel, casts out demons, and cures the paralyzed or lame. This work with the Samaritans is the bridge leading to a full fledged mission to the Gentiles. Samaritans were not considered to be Jews by the Jews of Judea. After the exile of 721 B.C.E. the Jews who were not exported intermarried with non-Jews. They set up their own form of worship on Mt. Gerizim and did not hold a belief in the expectation of a coming Messiah. They expected a final prophetic deliverer whom God would send, referred to as the "Restorer" An important precedent is set by the fact that the Samaritans do not have to become Jews in order to become Christians. Philip proclaims that Jesus the Messiah is the one who fulfills the Samaritan's expectation of a "Restorer." The Samaritans receive this message with great joy. This process will carry over into the Gentile mission. Official apostles, Peter and John, are sent to Samaria to confirm what has gone on there (Acts 8:14-17). While the Samaritans had been baptized they had not yet received the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is essential and it is conferred by Peter and John. Three things are always essential for becoming a Christian: Baptism, the Holy Spirit, and apostolic approval. The order in which they are received varies but all have to be present to be considered a full member of the Christian community.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 66:1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 16, 20

¶(1) Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.

Or: ✠ Alleluia.

Shout joyfully to God, all the earth,
sing praise to the glory of his name;
proclaim his glorious praise.
Say to God, "How tremendous are your deeds!"

"Let all on earth worship and sing praise to you,
sing praise to your name!"
Come and see the works of God,
his tremendous deeds among the children of Adam.

He has changed the sea into dry land;
through the river they passed on foot;
therefore let us rejoice in him.
He rules by his might forever.

Hear now, all you who fear God, while I declare
what he has done for me.
Blessed be God who refused me not
my prayer or his kindness!

Psalm 66:1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 16, 20

Commentary by Deacon Owen Cummings: The psalmist calls out for everyone on earth to acknowledge God in praise, "Let *all* the earth cry out to God with joy." Notice the occurrence of "all" in the first two stanzas, and in the verse response. Praise is the proper response of all creation, "all the earth." Reasons are provided for this proper praise of God. In the second stanza we are invited to "Come and see the works of God" and the third stanza provides concrete examples of God's working: the crossing of Israel through the sea dry-shod, recorded in the Book of Exodus, and the similar crossing through the River Jordan, recorded in the Book of Joshua. The concrete examples now move from the nation at large in its historic past to the speaker in the first person in the fourth stanza, "Hear... while *I* declare what he has done for me." If the psalm originated in the liturgy of the Jerusalem Temple, perhaps during the Feast of God's Kingship, this last stanza may have been on the lips of the Judean king, the very representative of God. Whatever the originating circumstances, however, it is in this last

stanza that our own hearts and lives are lifted up. We too can proclaim through faith's eyes not only what God has done for us, but what God is now doing. He does not refuse "his kindness" from any of us.

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Second Reading 1 Peter 3:15-18

Put to death in the flesh, Christ was raised to life in the Spirit.

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Peter

Beloved:

Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.

Always be ready to give an explanation

to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope,
but do it with gentleness and reverence,
keeping your conscience clear,
so that, when you are maligned,
those who defame your good conduct in Christ
may themselves be put to shame.

For it is better to suffer for doing good,

if that be the will of God, than for doing evil.

For Christ also suffered for sins once,

the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous,
that he might lead you to God.

Put to death in the flesh,

he was brought to life in the Spirit.

The word of the Lord.

1 Peter 3:15-18

Commentary by Fr. Damien Dougherty, O.F.M.: Participation in the sufferings of Christ, accepted within the intimacy of one's conscience ("heart"), actually places the Christians on the same level of worship as the sacrifice of Christ. He sanctified himself, personally, by offering himself to the Father for others; he now continues this work of oblation within the offering that Christians make of themselves united to him. God does not want the suffering of Christians but he can ask, as he did with Christ, their contribution of suffering for salvation and this divine request will be manifested by the concrete circumstances within which the Christians find themselves in life.

The suffering of the Christian in order to be at the level of the theological value that Peter attributes to it must not be a suffering due to a merited punishment: in such a case the theological framework would change and one would have to speak of the value of personal expiation and purification. Therefore, the Christians will have to feel themselves committed fully in doing the right and avoiding evil in order to know how to qualify their suffering.

The suffering of Christ has a determinant value: by the sole fact that Christ, innocent, suffered, the guiltless suffering of Christians has its own full value, associated with the value of Christ's suffering. His redemptive passion happened once for all, liberating us from sins, permitting us access to God through the Spirit whom Christ possesses, in all the fullness of his resurrection, tending towards the salvation of all people.

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Gospel Acclamation John 14:23

✠ Alleluia, alleluia.

Whoever loves me will keep my word, says the Lord,
and my Father will love him and we will come to him.

Gospel John 14:15-21

I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

Jesus said to his disciples:

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments.
And I will ask the Father,
and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always,
the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept,
because it neither sees nor knows him.
But you know him, because he remains with you,
and will be in you.
I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.
In a little while the world will no longer see me,
but you will see me, because I live and you will live.
On that day you will realize that I am in my Father
and you are in me and I in you.

Whoever has my commandments and observes them
is the one who loves me.
And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father,
and I will love him and reveal myself to him."

The Gospel of the Lord

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John 14:15-21

Commentary by Deacon Owen Cummings: If the first reading today, from Acts 8 telling us of the missionary activity of Philip, Peter and John, provides us with a paradigm of the Church in action/mission, the gospel reading from John gives us a paradigm of the Church's identity, the foundation of its mission. Quite simply, the gospel text today reminds us, in words of Origen of Alexandria, that the Church is "full of the Trinity." The Lord Jesus is going away, but he tells his disciples that another Paraclete/Advocate, the Holy Spirit will be given. In verse 6 of this chapter, Jesus proclaimed, "I am the truth." The Paraclete who is to be "with (us) always" is described as "the Spirit of truth." He brings about the presence of Jesus in us, a presence not only "with (us)", but "within (us)." What does the Lord mean by the words "I will come back to you"? It certainly means that he will come back in Resurrection, but surely it also means that he will return in the Parousia. From Resurrection to Parousia he will be presenced among us through Baptism and Eucharist, making us in Pope John Paul II's words *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, "the Church made by the Eucharist." As a result, we will know that, in Jesus' words, "I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you." If he is in us, and we are in him, and he is in the Father, then we too are in the Father. The Church, full of the Trinity, is impelled by that indwelling Trinity to bring others to Trinitarian awareness and living. The Trinity invites and enables the Church in action/mission.

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