

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER – May 17, 2020

Jesus does not leave his followers orphaned. Through the Holy Spirit Jesus comes to abide with his disciples of every generation. As Pentecost draws near, we are reminded that the risen Christ dwells in us as the Spirit of truth. We receive this Spirit in baptism and pray that in our gathering around the Lord's Table the Spirit will transform us to be the body of the risen Christ in the world.

READINGS AND PSALM

Acts 17:22-31

Psalm 66:8-20

Bless our God, you peoples; let the sound of praise be heard. (Ps. 66:8)

1 Peter 3:13-22

John 14:15-21

Acts 17:22-31

In Athens, Paul faces the challenge of proclaiming the gospel to Greeks who know nothing of either Jewish or Christian tradition. He proclaims that the "unknown god" whom they worship is the true Lord of heaven and earth who will judge the world with justice through Jesus, whom God has raised from the dead.

1 Peter 3:13-22

Christians have a zeal for doing what is right in God's eyes no matter what the circumstances because in baptism we are saved and made alive. Thus our Christian beliefs and behavior are to be a matter of public record just as our baptism is.

GOSPEL: John 14:15-21

In final words to his disciples on the night of his arrest, Jesus encourages obedience to his commandments and speaks of the Spirit, who will be with them forever.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹⁵"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. ¹⁸I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

Meditation

Jesus gives only a single commandment in John and it occurs in the chapter just before: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (13.34-35). He reiterates this in the chapter just after ours: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." In John, there's only one

question to ask yourself: "In what ways did I or did I not love today?" That is definitely the question we are faced with in our world today, our country, our community, our family, and even in our own church.

In this passage Jesus anticipates the Easter moment when he says, "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you" and "because I live, you also will live" (14:18-19). The Easter message is that life rather than death has the final word, and this is crucial for faith. In John's gospel, faith is a relationship with a living being. For there to be authentic faith in Jesus, people must be able to relate to the living Jesus--a Jesus who is not absent but present. Otherwise faith is reduced to the memory of a Jesus who died long ago.

As we approach Pentecost, John introduces us to the concept of the 'Spirit.' God has already given the gift of love unstintingly through the death and resurrection of Jesus, and such love is what creates genuine life. The Spirit is the Advocate who brings the truth of that love and life *to people* in this time after Easter, which makes faith possible. The Spirit will disclose the truth about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, but will not replicate these events. After Jesus' return to the Father, the Spirit remains with the disciples; but this does not mean the Spirit replaces Jesus. Rather, the Spirit discloses the presence of the risen Jesus and his Father to the community of faith. Jesus also says that the world cannot receive the Spirit of truth because it neither sees nor recognizes it (14:17). Here he refers to "the world" as the realm where people are alienated from God. "The world" consists of those who are hostile to Jesus and his followers (15:18). Saying that the world cannot receive the Spirit does not mean that an unbeliever cannot become a believer. Rather, it means that "the world" estranged from God cannot receive the Spirit while remaining unchanged. For the world to receive the Spirit means that it is no longer "the world" in the text of John's thinking. It loses its identity as "the world," for it is no longer alienated from God

Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, you hold together all things in heaven and on earth. In your great mercy receive the prayers of all your children, and give to all the world the Spirit of your truth and peace, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

