

Sixth Sunday of Easter

First Lesson: Acts 17: 16-31

St. Paul is in the midst of his **second** missionary journey to Asia Minor and Greece. He has just been forced out of Thessalonica and Berea because the **Jews** are **jealous** of the followings he gathers when he preaches and teaches. The Berean brethren hurriedly send St. Paul by **ship** to Athens to preclude any **physical** danger to St. Paul, while Silas and Timothy follow him by **land**. Since St. Paul has **time** on his hands while he is waiting for Silas and Timothy to arrive, he wanders around **Athens**, and is amazed by all the different kinds of **idols** he sees, all to **every** kind of god imaginable. So he starts to address this in the synagogues and marketplaces, thereby catching the interest of two groups of philosophers: the **Epicureans**—those who believe in the **indulgence** of sensual pleasures, and the **Stoics**—those who believe in the **repression** of emotion and an **indifference** to pleasure. St. Paul's preaching of Jesus and the resurrection is something **new** to these philosophers, so he is brought to the **Areopagus**—a **religious** council having jurisdiction over the civil and religious doings of Athens. There St. Paul gives an incredibly **astute** introduction to his observations in Athens, followed by a concise **history** of the world, from the God who **created** it to the God who **redeemed** it, ending with St. Paul issuing God's command that **all** people should repent.

Epistle Lesson: 1 Peter 3: 13-22

Recall from last week's reading that St. Peter had described how the New Testament Christians have the **identical** calling that God had issued to the Children of Israel at the time that Moses was leading them out of Egypt toward the Promised Land. Their—and **our** responsibility—was and is to proclaim the **mercy and grace** of the God who called us out of **rebellion** to be his children. But now he notes that this witness may not be without **consequence**. However, despite the **suffering** brought about by our witness, we are to be prepared to testify to **anyone** who asks us about the hope we have. But then St. Peter advises that we do so with **gentleness** and **respect**, in the same way that St.

Paul addressed the Athenians, so that those who **slander** us for our **righteous** behavior in Christ will be put to shame. After all, it is better to suffer for doing **God's will** rather than for doing evil, just as Christ did when on earth. His suffering, death, and resurrection **secured** our status as Children of God. St. Peter then explains that **after** his resurrection, Jesus descended to hell to proclaim to the unbelievers **there** that their rejection of God during the Old Testament period justified their current and continuing punishment, particularly since Noah—while he was building the ark—preached **repentance** to many of them, but to no avail. St. Peter then compares the passage of Noah and his family through the waters of the flood to **our baptism**, since **both** brought the individual to **salvation**—all through **believing** God.

Gospel Lesson: John 14: 15-21

Jesus is carrying on a discourse on the relationship between Him and the Godhead, and between the Godhead and the believing disciples. The following points are notable:

- **If a** disciple loves Jesus, **then** he/she will keep His commandments.
- Jesus promises to send to the believing disciples a **Helper**, the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit **cannot** be received by unbelievers.
- The Holy Spirit currently is **with** the disciples, and will be **in** them.
- Because Jesus **lives**, His disciples will **also** live.
- In that day (apparently referring to the **Day of Pentecost**), His disciples will know that Jesus is in the Father, His disciples are in Jesus, and Jesus is in His disciples.
- Whoever **loves** Jesus will be loved by both Jesus **and** His Father, and Jesus will **reveal** Himself to him/her.

Seventh Sunday of Easter

First Lesson: Acts 1: 12-26

As our reading begins today, we find the apostles returning to Jerusalem from Mt. Olivet, from which they had just witnessed the **ascension** of Jesus into Heaven. They return to an upper room where they continually engage in **prayer** with a number of the women disciples as well as Jesus' mother and brothers. A few days later they gather with all of the disciples, 120 in total, during which Peter is inspired to replace **Judas**—the apostle who **betrayed** Jesus and then, when feeling guilty about it, went out and hanged himself, which probably means impaling himself on a sword.

In any case, Peter lays out the **criteria** for selecting a replacement for Judas. And of the two possible candidates presented, the one was chosen **by lot**—the method used throughout the Old Testament period.

The New Testament period now uses a **different** method, with criteria listed in **1 Timothy 3** as well as **Titus 1**.

Epistle Lesson: 1 Peter 4: 12-19 and 5: 6-11

St. Peter continues his discussion of the sufferings, trials, and tribulations of the **witnessing** Christian, noting that such sufferings should not catch one by **surprise**. Recall the words of Jesus when he said, “**Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.**” **John 13:16**. Since Christ suffered, it is to be expected that **we** will suffer when we obey him. In fact, Jesus also said, “**Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.**” **Luke 6:22-23**.

St. Peter **echoes** those sentiments here, but also cautions that we should **not** expect God's commendation if we suffer for **unrighteous** behavior. He then notes that judgment will begin with those in the **household of God**; and if that is

so, what kind of judgment will fall on those who are **ungodly**? Consequently, St. Peter advises us to **humble** ourselves under God's authority, to be **sober-minded**, and to be **watchful**, because Satan is prowling around like a **lion**, looking to snatch somebody from the faith. Therefore, despite the sufferings that Satan may lay upon us, we should **resist** him, **stand firm** in the faith, and recognize that **practicing** Christians **throughout** the world are experiencing the **same** kind of suffering. In the meantime, we must keep our trust in **God**, who will at the proper **time** deliver us out of all our troubles and eventually restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish us.

Gospel Lesson: John 17: 1-11

Our reading for today is the first part of what is referred to as Jesus' "**high priestly prayer**." That is to say, Jesus is **interceding** to God the Father for his **disciples**. Some notable parts of this part of his prayer include the following:

- Jesus was given authority over **all** flesh by His Father in order to give eternal life to those whom the Father had given to **Jesus** (*i.e.*, all of His **disciples**).
- Eternal life consists of knowing the **true** God and Jesus **Christ**, whom the true God has sent.
- Jesus states that He has **glorified** the Father by completing **all** the tasks that the Father gave Him to do; consequently He asks the Father to give Him the **glory** that He had from time eternal.
- Jesus has revealed the **Father** to His disciples, who **now** know that **everything** that Jesus was given came from the Father.
- Jesus' disciples now know the **truth** that **what** Jesus gave them came from the Father, and they **believe** that the Father sent Jesus.
- Jesus notes that He is now coming **back** to the Father; therefore He asks the Father to not only to **keep** His disciples **in** the faith, but also to keep them as **one**, even as Jesus and the **Father** are one.

Day of Pentecost

Old Testament Lesson: Numbers 11: 24-30

The Children of Israel have entered their **second** year since the exodus from Egypt. During that year, much has happened: God has taken the Children of Israel as his **bride**, and they have taken God as **husband** at Mt. Sinai, with the marriage agreement represented by the **Ten Commandments**. The **tabernacle** has been built, along with all the furnishings and the altar. The **Ark** of the Covenant has also been built, and **robes** for the priests have been made. All during this time, God has sustained the **entire** camp—consisting of 600,000 military-age men (not counting the priests and Levites) along with their wives, children, flocks and herds—with water and manna. But now the **complaints** start. As if God’s liberation and provenance weren’t good **enough**, the people complained in general, and they complained that they didn’t have the **meat and vegetables** that they had in Egypt because now all they had was **manna**.

Moses, as God’s messenger, bore the **brunt** of these complaints. So Moses pleaded with God to take his life, since he was unable to provide the Children of Israel with what they wanted. God’s response was as follows:

- He would provide **meat** in the form of quail.
- He required Moses to come up with **70 leaders** of Israel, upon whom God would place some of Moses’ Spirit (meaning the **Holy Spirit**).

It is at this point that our reading for today begins. Moses gathers the 70 elders around the tabernacle (although 2 remained in the camp proper). And then God **anoints** these 70 men with the **Holy Spirit**, so that they begin to **prophesy**. But Joshua, upon learning that two men in the camp are **also** prophesying, wants Moses to **stop** them, thinking that only **Moses** and those immediately with him should be the ones to prophesy. But Moses, prophesying the events of the **Day of Pentecost**, responds by saying that he would want to have **all** of God’s people to be prophets.

Second Lesson: Acts 2: 1-21

The Old Testament Day of Pentecost, or Festival of Weeks, has arrived. This festival day, occurring exactly 50 days after the Passover, was prescribed by God

to celebrate the **spring harvest**. This was one of the three annual festivals which God **required** all adult males to attend (**Deuteronomy 16: 16-17**). This day finds the disciples all gathered together in one place, when suddenly the sound of a **powerful wind** fills the place and **tongues of fire** appear on each of the disciple's head. This is followed by the disciples starting to **praise God** in a multitude of languages such that **visitors** to Jerusalem from **throughout** the world, also there to celebrate the Festival of Weeks, hear the disciples praising God in their **native** languages. Of course, this results in a lot of **speculation**, including that all of the disciples are **drunk**. But Peter rises to the occasion, pointing out that it is only 9 o'clock in the morning, **far** too early for anyone to have become drunk. Instead, he directs the visitors' attention to the prophecy of **Joel**, who prophesied that in the **last days** (*i.e.*, the New Testament period), God would pour out His Spirit on **all** of His believers, fulfilling the prophecy of Moses. Joel's prophecy ends with that magnificent statement: "**Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.**"

Gospel Lesson: John 7: 37-39

The Festival of **Booths**, also known as the Festival of **Tabernacles** or the Festival of **Ingathering**, was a week-long celebration of the **fall harvest**. It was a **glorious** celebration of God's goodness, marked by **fellowship** offerings—in which the animal sacrificed was eaten by the **person** who offered the sacrifice, in addition to whomever he **invited** to celebrate with him. God particularly suggested, in addition to family and friends, that the **poor**, the **widows**, the **orphans**, the **priests and Levites**, and the **strangers and foreigners** be invited as well. This was a meal where there was a virtual sharing of food with **God Himself**. And this was a meal by which the **Jew** would have the opportunity to tell a **Gentile** about the wonderful things that God had done for him, and invite him into the **fellowship** with God.

It is during this celebration in Jerusalem that Jesus proclaims that **whoever** comes to Him to drink and **believes** in Him, out of that person will flow rivers of **living water** (the same term Jesus used with the Samaritan woman at the well). What was this living water? It was the **Holy Spirit** which believers **were** to receive, but only **after** Jesus was glorified after His resurrection.

Holy Trinity Sunday

Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 1: 1 - 2: 4a

Today's reading recounts the creation. By day, these events happened:

Day 1: The heavens and the earth are created. Notice the plural "heavens." Also notice that the "heavens" seems to be a vast void at this point (see Day 4). The earth is without form, and enveloped in darkness. The **Spirit of God** hovers over the waters, as if waiting for the next step. Then God creates day and night by creating light.

Day 2: Heaven itself is created as an **expanse** between (apparently) masses of water.

Day 3: Earth and seas are formed out of the waters under the heavens, and dry land is called forth. Then God causes various kinds of plants, vegetation, and fruit trees to **grow from** the earth.

Day 4: The sun and moon are created to establish time and **seasons**. In addition, the stars of the heavens are created. Thus day and night are established.

Day 5: Creatures of the seas and birds of the air are created, and commanded to be fruitful and multiple. Note that this day's creations required a lot of **artistic** expression. Why so? Just consider the huge variety of incredibly beautiful fish of the oceans and birds of the tropics.

Day 6: God then calls forth **from the earth** creatures of all kinds: livestock, crawling things, and beasts. Then God says, "Let **us** (notice the plural) make man in **our** image" (presumably a **trinity**: body, soul, and spirit), to exercise **dominion** over the earth and everything **in and on** it. And he creates mankind as male and female so that they could be fruitful and multiply. God then established diets for his creatures: every plant yielding seed and every fruit with seed in it is given to man, while every other living creature is given green plants for food. Notice that at this point, man is **not** given any other creature (**meat**) for food.

Day 7: God rests from the previous 6 days of work.

Second Lesson: Acts 2: 14a and 22-36

Today's reading is another excerpt from the events that occurred on the Day of Pentecost. In particular, it is another portion of Peter's sermon on that date, in which he first of all establishes Jesus as **a man through** whom **God (the Father)** did many mighty works, wonders, and signs. Peter then points to his **listeners** as the ones who crucified and killed Jesus—thereby fulfilling a plan by the foreknowledge of God. Peter then establishes that Jesus' resurrection was **foretold** by King David, to whom God had promised that one of **his** descendants would occupy an **eternal** throne.

(2 Samuel 7) Next, Peter notes that subsequent to Jesus' resurrection, he was exalted to the right hand of the **Father**, and has received the **Holy Spirit** whom He is now pouring out on the believers. Thus God has made Jesus both **Lord (diety) and Christ**. In other words, within a few minutes, Peter establishes the truth of the Godhead trinity **and** establishes Jesus as both true man and true God.

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 28: 16-20

Jesus and his eleven disciples are in Galilee, on a mountain top, where Jesus gives them some last instructions. Namely, **God the Father** has given **Jesus, the Son**, all authority in heaven and earth (*i.e.*, the entire creation). Jesus then commands his disciples to **continue** the work that He had begun by

- making disciples of **all** nations
- baptizing all new disciples in the name of the **Father**, the **Son**, and the **Holy Spirit** (*i.e.*, the Trinity)
- teaching all new disciples to observe **all** that Jesus had commanded them (the disciples) to do [so **we** have the responsibility to read the four gospels in order to find out what all it **was** that Jesus commanded his disciples to do!].

Jesus then assures his disciples that He will be with them **always**, even to the **end** of the New Testament period. This then is a **promise** that **we** need to hold on to as we live in this present age.