

Reflections on the Readings for the 6th Sunday of Easter A

John 14: 15-21

Now only two weeks away from the celebration of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit enters into the picture painted by Jesus at the Last Supper of what is to happen in the future. He promises that the disciples will never be orphaned: He, the Father and “another Helper”/the Holy Spirit will be with them all the time. He goes on to say that this is an expression of Father’s love for us, just as He loves Jesus himself. The boldest statement in this passage is possibly, “In that day you will know that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you.” God living in us, all the time, at every step of our journey through life. This is a quite mind-boggling idea, because it is so simple, and yet so profoundly true.

Acts 8: 5-8, 14-17

We are still in the very early stages of the account of the first preaching of the Gospel by the apostles and their companions. After the death of Stephen, the first martyr, in the persecution led by the Pharisee Saul (who will later become St Paul), many disciples fled Jerusalem for safer places. This included the territory just North of Judaea, called Samaria. We know of the poor regard in which the Jewish people held the Samaritan peoples who lived in that area (cf. The Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:29f.), and Jesus meeting the Samaritan Woman at the Well (Jn.4:1f.)), nevertheless, Philip, one of the seven men appointed to the new ministry instituted in last week’s Reading from Acts, takes the message of the Gospel to these people. This is the beginning of the expansion of the mission in the command given by Jesus, “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

1 Peter 3: 15-18

Remember that St Peter is writing to people who were undergoing persecution for their faith. They are called to “honour Christ the Lord as holy,” in their hearts. Notice that they are to reply to their accusers, “with gentleness and respect... so that those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame.” In other words, they are to act in the same way that Jesus himself did when he was interrogated and tortured by the Jewish and Roman authorities. In this way, like Christ, although facing death they will be “made alive in the spirit”. The witness (martyrdom) of so many people in the Early Church is quite astonishing to us who, certainly in the West, have never suffered anything like this in recent times.

Prayer

Lord, may your Spirit guide us as we give witness to your risen presence in our lives. May our way of living be a sign which attracts others to the same hope offered by your Son’s death and Resurrection. Amen.