

Reflections on the Readings for the 7th Sunday of Easter A

John 17:1-11

Coming towards the end of our celebration of Easter, our Gospel Reading is already looking towards the next stage of sharing the Good News. Up to this point Jesus' words to the disciples at the Last Supper have been characterised as a discourse, now they become a prayer: sometimes called "The High Priestly Prayer". Firstly, he prays to the Father about his coming "glorification" which will complete his work on earth. Then, he prays that those whom the Father has entrusted to him, and who he is now leaving behind, will be protected in the world. "Eternal life" is the gift that Jesus offers to those who do accept his word. This "life" is to know in an experiential way, not simply as a piece of head knowledge, the God revealed in Jesus. The second part of the prayer (not given in today's Reading) is centred on the disciples. It includes the petition that "they may all be one". In this way people will be better able to believe in the message they will preach. Preparing for Pentecost is also about praying for unity among Jesus' present-day disciples.

Acts 1:12-14

In these days between the Ascension and Pentecost we are taken back to the beginning of the Book of Acts. Here we find the disciples (notice the unspecified number of disciples alongside Mary and the Apostles) immediately after Jesus had left them to go back to his Father. They are at prayer, waiting for the Spirit that will empower them to go out to preach what they have learned from Jesus. Now, as well as having accompanied him during his earlier preaching ministry in Galilee and Judaea, they have met him in various appearances after his Resurrection. We, too, are called to prayer in these days before Pentecost, praying for a renewal of the Holy Spirit in our own lives, and in the church as a whole.

1 Peter 4:13-16

In the verse preceding today's extract Peter writes, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes to test you..." This gives us the context in which he goes on to urge them to "rejoice" in their suffering. Such thoughts will be far from the experience of most of us who listen to this Reading. Every year, around this time, we celebrate the Feast of the English Martyrs from Reformation times. These were men and women who faced the same kind of persecution as the recipients of this Letter. We also remember that in other parts of the world even today people suffer because of their adherence to the Christian Faith. Martyrdom is still very much part of the Christian Faith for some. The final sentence is, perhaps, the most challenging for those who have not had to suffer for their faith, "... if anyone suffers as a Christian... let him glorify God in that name."

Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Amen.