

Sixth Sunday of Easter

First Lesson: Acts 10: 34-48

Today's reading finds us in the major sea port of **Caesarea**, a port built by **Herod the Great** and named after Caesar. **There** lived a Roman army officer, **Cornelius**, a Centurion, who was **devout**, who respected **God**, prayed, and was known for his **gifts** to poor Jewish people. As a consequence, God sent an **angel** to him one afternoon, instructing him to send for **Peter**, in nearby Joppa (about 30 miles away, a good day's journey). The next day, in Joppa,, as Cornelius' delegation approached, we find Peter on the **rooftop** (remember, roofs were flat) waiting for lunch and praying, when suddenly he sees a large **tablecloth** lowered from heaven on which were all sorts of **unclean** animals, and God telling Peter to kill and eat. When Peter objects, God tells him **not** to call unclean what **He has made clean**. This vision is repeated twice more. So that when the delegation from Cornelius arrives, Peter is getting the drift of God's vision to him, that **Gentiles were no longer to be considered unclean**. Consequently, the delegation is invited **into** the house, and the next day, at the home of Cornelius, Peter **enters his house**, neither of which any devout Jew would ever consider doing.

When Peter is told **why** he has been invited to the home of Cornelius, he realizes that God's hand was involved in every step. So he gives a brief history of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, and why it had to take place. Then, to the astonishment of Peter and his contingent, God makes sure that they understand that **Gentiles are entitled to the same place with God as the Jews** by baptizing the household of Cornelius in the Holy Spirit, **just as the disciples were baptized on the day of Pentecost**. The Jewish Christians are left **stammering** that if God had done **that**, there probably was no reason **not** to baptize the household of Cornelius with **water**, which they do. Cornelius then invites Peter and his party to stay for several days, no doubt to teach them all about **how to live** the Christian life.

Epistle Lesson: 1 John 5: 1-8

As **St. John** winds down his treatise on **God's love**, he notes that if someone has **truly** been born of God, that person will

- **believe** in Jesus as the Messiah,
- **love** the Father, and
- truly love everyone **else** who has been born of God.

In fact, St. John observes, this is **how** one determines that this is the case, by seeing that

- we love the **other** Children of God, and
- we **love** God and **obey** His commandments.

What are God's commandments? To love God and to love each other. And those who have **faith in** and **believe** that **Jesus is the Son of God** overcome the temptations of the world.

Finally, St. John notes that Jesus came by **water** (*i.e.*, water baptism) and by **blood** (*i.e.*, his death on the cross), and the work of the **Holy Spirit** is to testify that this **is** the truth, thus reassuring us that we **are** Children of God.

Gospel Lesson: John 15: 9-17

As we continue reading Jesus' statements that He is the **vine** and we are the **branches**, and that we can bear **fruit only** if we abide in Him, Jesus now notes that we need to **abide in His love**. And we can do that only by **keeping the Father's commandments**. When that happens, Jesus' **joy** will be in us. Again, what is Jesus' commandment to us? **To love one another** just as He loved us, with the **kind** of love that makes a significant sacrifice for someone **else's** benefit. Then Jesus notes that we are **His** friends **if** we obey his commandments; we are no longer just **servants**.

When Jesus states that **we** did not choose Him but that **He** chose **us** in order to bear much **fruit**, He reminds us of that promise that **whatever** we ask the Father in Jesus' name, He will give it to you in order to show that we truly do **love each other** and that the **Father may be glorified**.

Seventh Sunday of Easter

First Lesson: Acts 1: 12-26

Today's reading finds us back to immediately **after** the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The apostles, along with the women (which included Mary, the Mother of Jesus) and even Jesus' **brothers**, now gathered in an upper room to pray, obeying Jesus' command to **wait** in Jerusalem for the **promise** of the Father (**Luke 24:49**). A total of 120 apparently were there. And you know Peter, always having to say or do **something**. This time it is to replace Judas Iscariot with **another** who would be designated as an apostle.

As far as Judas was concerned, we know from **Matthew chapter 27** that Judas had **remorse** for betraying Jesus and threw the 30 pieces of silver into the temple before hanging himself. Note that in the Old Testament, **hanging** often meant impaling on a sword or a post, thus explaining the **nature** of Judas' death. In the meantime, the **chief priests** acknowledged that the money could **not** be put into the temple treasury since it had been used to **murder** someone, so they used it to buy a field for the burial of **strangers**.

But back in the upper room, Peter uses **Psalm 69** and **Psalm 109** to justify replacing Judas with another. And after coming up with the criteria for a replacement, two men qualify, and the one being chosen by the **casting of lots**. This appears to be the **last** time that the casting of lots was used to select candidates for the ministry. Hereafter, people were chosen on the basis of **select criteria** (for example, see **Acts 6** for the selection of deacons, and **1 Timothy 3** and **Titus 1** for the selection of **spiritual leaders**).

Epistle Lesson: 1 John 5: 9-15

We conclude **St. John's** treatise on **God's love** by his noting that there are **several** witnesses to the finished work of Jesus:

- the Father **Himself**, and
- whoever** believes in the Son of God.

And what is the **testimony** of these witnesses? That God gave us **eternal** life through His Son. And whoever **believes** in that Son, Jesus, **has** eternal life.

However, whoever does **not** believe in Jesus as the Promised Messiah does **not** have life. In fact, such people are calling God the Father a **liar** because they disagree with His testimony!

But St. John is writing to believers to assure them that they have not only **eternal life** but the **promise of God** that if we ask anything **according to His will**, He hears us. Consequently, if God hears us, we **know** that we have the requests that we made. How so important, then, that we **daily** study God's Word so that we **know** His will and can pray **effectively** as His soldiers on earth.

Gospel Lesson: John 17: 11b-19

It is the time of the **last supper** of Jesus with His disciples in the upper room. Judas has left to begin the **betrayal** process, leaving Jesus to **prepare** His remaining disciples for the anguish that they are going to experience within a short period of time. Then Jesus offers a **prayer** for His disciples to His Father, after which they all leave for the Garden of Gethsemane, where He will be betrayed and arrested.

But in that prayer for His disciples, Jesus asks His Father to take care of them **after** His betrayal, just as He took care of them while He was **with** them, except for one who was lost in fulfillment of Scripture. But now, Jesus notes, He is coming **back** to the Father, and He wants His joy kept in His **disciples**.

Then Jesus notes that because **His Word** is in His disciples, **the world will hate** them because they **refuse** to be a part of the world's scene. Isn't that **really** true today? If you want to see what **hate** really is, look at the people who are constantly **attacking** Christian beliefs and faith. And that **hate** is in stark contrast to the **love of Jesus** that should characterize **every** person who calls him/herself a Christian.

Jesus concludes that, just as **He** was not of the world, so His **disciples** are not of this world. And just as He **consecrated** Himself to the truth, so He asks the Father to **sanctify (or consecrate)** all of His disciples in the truth. And what is truth? **God's Word!**

The Day of Pentecost

Old Testament Lesson: Ezekiel 37: 1-14

The day of reckoning for the **Southern** Kingdom, or **Judah**, had come. In 597 B.C., King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon **defeated** Judah and hauled its people to **Babylon**, which began their 70 years of Babylonian Captivity. Ezekiel was **included** in the captives, and God turned to **him** to be a messenger to the captive people during the **early** part of their captivity. Of course, being captive in a foreign country can be draining, especially if you are the **children** of the ones who caused the captivity to take place, and all you know of Judah are the **stories** told to you by your parents. As a consequence, you might feel **forsaken** by God, left out in the middle of a dry field with no **water**, with **no** foreseeable life to live.

It is **this** picture that God presents to Ezekiel: a large valley filled with **dry, bleached** bones. And God's question to Ezekiel: can these bones **live**?

God then instructs Ezekiel to **speak** to these bones, and as he does, the bones start to **rattle** and come **together**, then sinews, then muscle, then flesh, until there is a vast army of people lying there but with no **breath** in them. When God tells Ezekiel to command the breath (*i.e.*, **the Spirit**) to come into them, He does, and the bodies become a vast army of **living** people. And **that** was the message that God wanted Ezekiel to **convey** to the people of Judah in captivity: God would **indeed** restore them to life, and bring them to the land of Israel. But then God adds that He will open the graves and **resurrect the people** from the dead, an obvious prophecy of the work completed by Jesus: **all** believers would be raised from the dead to **eternal life**.

Epistle Lesson: Acts 2: 1-21

As you will recall from last Sunday's First Lesson, the disciples were gathered—and **stayed**—in Jerusalem per the command of Jesus, who had told them to **wait** for the **Promise of the Father (Luke 24:49)** there. **This** was now that day. And that morning, the Holy Spirit came with the sound of a **mighty rushing wind**, and with **flames of fire** resting on each of them, causing them to pour out to God **praises in many languages**, obviously not those they had learned since almost all of them were Galileans, considered uneducated. But God was causing these praises to be heard by **all the peoples from other countries** who were living in Jerusalem, all **astonished** that the Galileans could not only speak something **other** than the vernacular, but that they were speaking **their** language. But it is Peter again who **rises** to the occasion, telling the gathering crowd that what they are seeing and hearing is a **fulfillment of the prophecy** of Joel (**Joel 2:28-32**) in which God tells us that in the **last days** (*i.e.*, the New Testament period), He will pour out His Spirit on **all** flesh, including sons and daughters, young and old men, and male and female servants, causing them to **prophesy**, all with the accompaniment of **signs and wonders**. Peter then indicates, **echoing** Joel, that **everyone** who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Gospel Lesson: John 15: 26-27 and 16: 4b-15

You may recall from two and three Sundays ago that Jesus was expanding to His disciples on the topic of He being the **vine** and we Christians the **branches** who are to bear fruit. All of this was to **reassure** them (and us), and help them to deal with the **anxiety** that was to come as Jesus would soon be arrested and **killed**. Part of that reassurance was that Jesus would later send the **Helper** (in other words, the **Holy Spirit**), who would help them **to bear witness** to the truth. In addition, it would be the **Holy Spirit** who would **convict** the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment. And when the Holy Spirit comes to believers, He will **guide each individual into truth**, declaring the things that are to come, and **glorifying Jesus**.

Holy Trinity Sunday

Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 6: 1-8

Isaiah, as you will recall, was God's voice of repentance to the **Southern** Kingdom, or **Judah**, around the time of the **Northern** Kingdom's demise around 720 B.C. In the earlier part of his ministry, in the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah receives a **vision** from God. What do we know about King **Uzziah**? He was a **righteous** king, that is, for a time. But because God blessed his reign with increasing fame and power, King Uzziah became so **prideful** that God had to step in. And He did so by afflicting King Uzziah with **leprosy**, effectively ending his reign. Although the successor to the throne, King Uzziah's son **Jotham**, was a **relatively** righteous king, he was soon replaced by **his** son, King **Ahaz**, who led the nation into the idolatry more characteristic of the reign of King **Ahab** of the **Northern** Kingdom.

It is during the reign of King **Jotham**, then, that the Lord gives Isaiah this **vision** of the power and majesty of God. Isaiah actually **sees** the Lord sitting on His throne, His train filling the temple, with **angels** above the Lord proclaiming the holiness and **glory** of God. Then the voice that calls out to Isaiah is so **powerful** that it causes the temple to **shake**. Remembering God's much earlier statement (**Exod. 33:20**) that whoever sees the face of God will **die**, Isaiah fears for the worst, because he realizes **his** sinfulness and in addition he is **seeing** the Lord. But an **angel** comes to Isaiah with a burning piece of coal with which he touches Isaiah's **lips**, and tells him that his **sin and guilt** is taken away. Immediately Isaiah hears the voice of God again, asking, "Who will go for us?" **Us**? Who is "**us**?" The same God whose **Spirit** hovered over the waters at the time of creation, who proposed, "Let **us** make man in **our** image, after **our** likeness." Without hesitation, this is the **only** God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to whom Isaiah answers, "**I** will go; send me!"

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

The scene is the Day of Pentecost, as we read about last Sunday, with the 120 disciples praising God in languages that they had not **learned** but whose words were **understood** by the gathering crowd of peoples from other countries who

were living in Jerusalem, because the words they heard were in their **native** tongue. Peter has risen to the occasion by preaching a sermon about the **life and ministry of Jesus**, making it very clear that **his listeners** were responsible for demanding the death of Jesus. But listen carefully to Peter's words: he is describing the **Trinity**. Consider **first** Peter's characterization of **Jesus, the Son of God**:

- attested to by **God (the Father)**
- **God (the Father)** did mighty works, wonders, and signs **through** Him,
- He is the **Holy One** who does not see corruption,
- **God the Father** raised Him from the dead,
- **God the Father** exalted Him to His right hand in Heaven, and
- God has made Jesus both **Lord and Christ (Messiah)**.

Then Peter states that what the crowd is seeing and hearing right at that moment is the pouring out of the **Holy Spirit** on his disciples.

So who is Peter describing? The **only true God, Father, Son Jesus, and the Holy Spirit**.

Gospel Lesson: John 3: 1-17

You may remember that we heard a portion of today's reading as the Gospel Lesson for the recent fourth Sunday in Lent. **Nicodemus**, a Pharisee and a member of the prestigious Jewish ruling council, has come to Jesus at **night** (after all, no **politically correct** Pharisee would come to Jesus for **anything**). But Nicodemus is not opinionated. Rather, he wants to be **educated**. As an excellent teacher, Jesus first of all ascertains what Nicodemus **really** knows about God, faith, and becoming reconciled with God. Apparently it was not **much**, because Jesus has to start from **scratch**, explaining the concept of being "born again" of the **Spirit**. Then Jesus notes that **He, the Son of Man** who descended from Heaven, is **the** person in whom people must believe if they are to be saved and have eternal life. Jesus finishes by saying that **God (the Father)** loved the world so much that He offered His **Only Son, Jesus**, as the **only** way to take away sins, be saved, and gain eternal life—simply by **believing** in Him. Thus, in a brief discussion with Nicodemus, Jesus testifies to the existence of **One God existing as a Holy Trinity**.