



**Sixth Sunday of Easter - May 17, 2020 - Saint Francis of Assisi Parish**

**INVITATION TO PRAY**

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

**PROCLAIM THE SCRIPTURES AND THE GOSPEL OUT LOUD**

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

**Scripture Reading: Acts 8:5-8, 14-17**

Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Christ to them. With one accord, the crowds paid attention to what was said by Philip when they heard it and saw the signs he was doing. For unclean spirits, crying out in a loud voice, came out of many possessed people, and many paralyzed or crippled people were cured. There was great joy in that city.

Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who went down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for it had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

**Psalm: Ps 66:1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 16, 20**

**R. Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.**

Shout joyfully to God, all the earth,  
sing praise to the glory of his name;  
proclaim his glorious praise.

Say to God, "How tremendous are your deeds!"

**R. Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.**

"Let all on earth worship and sing praise to you,  
sing praise to your name!"

Come and see the works of God,  
his tremendous deeds among the children of Adam.

**R. Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.**

He has changed the sea into dry land;  
through the river they passed on foot;  
therefore let us rejoice in him.

He rules by his might forever.

**R. Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.**

Hear now, all you who fear God, while I declare  
what he has done for me.

Blessed be God who refused me not  
my prayer or his kindness!

**R. Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.**

**Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 3:15-18**

Beloved: Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that be the will of God, than for doing evil.

For Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous, that he might lead you to God. Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the Spirit.

**Gospel: John 14:15-21**

Jesus said to his disciples: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the

Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows him. But you know him, because he remains with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me, because I live and you will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him.”

## HOMILY

**"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."** We hear these words in the middle of the great departing speech of Jesus, meant to comfort his disciples before he leaves them. But here we could almost doubt whether this speech is actually a speech of comfort, or rather an exhortation. Christ says "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. and he will ask for the gift of the spirit", and again he says, "he who loves me will be loved by my Father." It sounds as though the gift of the spirit, and God's love for us, depends on *our* love for him, depends on our keeping the commandments. But what about when we make mistakes, if we at some point don't keep Jesus' commandments, if we fail in love? Will we then be *no longer* loved by the Father? And this is supposed to be a joyful message? What is up with this?

While not entirely off the mark, this would be a misunderstanding of the Gospel message. The Gospel surely presents us here with a call to love, a call that can be, and often is challenging. But above all, it presents us with a gift. In this incredibly complex web of loving and being loved, giving and receiving, a friendship is depicted that actually exceeds all description. Jesus is telling us: God is not a vending machine, in which we throw requests from time to time to get something from him. He is not a fundamental energy of love, that is simply there and radiates blindly, without any interaction. He is a *personal lover*, and offers us not only his *love*, but also *friendship*. This is the great message of the Gospel: we are invited to be friends with God himself! And friendship is always a mutual relationship, which must be accepted and fostered.

Friendship means meeting each other, sharing experiences with each other, spending time together. If I were to never chat with my friends, never do anything with them, never communicate with them, our friendship would gradually dissolve. Here Jesus makes a truly great promise. He promises that this meeting with him and his Father *is* possible, even after he has gone from us. "He who loves me... I will manifest myself to him." "He will remain with us, and we shall even see him." ... "The world will see me no more, but you will see me."

This meeting with Christ occurs in different ways. We meet him in the daily contact with one another. We will all, every one of us, be surprised and astonished how truly, how literally Christ meant, "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." We meet Christ through faith and in the power of the Holy Spirit, who

"remains with us and will be in us", as we have heard today in the Gospel. We also meet him in prayer.

In normal times and in a special way we encounter Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist. There is fulfilled in a special manner Jesus' words of comfort: "You will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." In this celebration we anticipate the future, actually unimaginable meeting that "God has prepared for those who love him." In this life we will never wholly reach the peace and happiness that we really desire, but when we receive Jesus lovingly in the Eucharist, we already participate in a mysterious fashion in this infinite happiness. We can have an inkling what it means to be embraced by an infinite love that never abandons us and that also unites us most closely to one another. Let us pray for the grace to ever more realize and appreciate this gift of the Eucharist, this veiled encounter with Jesus Christ, and thereby to grow in friendship with him. Take this time as we fast from Mass to really develop that friendship with God. There's still time!

## **INVITATION TO REFLECT**

- Jesus is aware that the imminent loss of his physical presence will be a big blow for his disciples. He reassures them "I will not leave you orphaned". The loss of his physical presence will be made up to them by the sending of the Holy Spirit, who will be with them permanently.
- In our changing and increasingly secularized society, one can easily feel a sense of loss and abandonment, but the Holy Spirit continues to guide and inspire us into new and creative forms of communicating the Good News in ways that are relevant to today's world.
- I do not need to rely on my own resources but turn to God who promises to help me, ready to send the Holy Spirit. To be open to the spirit, I must quieten first my body, then my heart. In this time of quiet God teaches me to see my world differently; I don't act in it alone but am accompanied by God's ever-present Spirit.

## **INVITATION TO CONSIDER**

- This week Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit, whom he calls the Spirit of Truth. This is the Spirit who reveals to me the truth of who I am - a child of God within whom God lives. I hold within myself a spark of the Divine! I sit quietly with this thought in the presence of God.
- How does this knowledge make me feel about myself? How does it affect my relationships – because within everyone is that same spark of the Divine. How does it affect my relationship with God? I talk to Jesus about these things.

## **CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY**

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

*Almighty ever-living God, lead us to a share in the joys of heaven, so that the humble flock may reach where the brave Shepherd has gone before. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.*

*Amen*