

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 17, 2020 A

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Loving God, thank you for sending us the Holy Spirit to guide us, teach us, comfort us and convict us of sin. Help us to be more aware of and responsive to your Spirit's presence and activity in our lives and in the world. May the Holy Spirit be with us now as we gather together to break open your holy Word. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: Filled with the Spirit (promised in the Gospel), Philip brings the Good News to Samaria (first reading). The second reading is an exhortation to be faithful despite suffering.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Acts 8:5-8, 14-17

The death of Stephen unleashes a persecution of the early church in Jerusalem that sends some of its members scurrying for safety in Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1). God uses this terrible event to bring the Good News to the people of Samaria, a people despised by Jews. These verses focus on the evangelization ministry of Philip, one of the first deacons. Philip's preaching is accompanied and confirmed by signs and wonders, which is the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy: "*You shall do greater works than I.*" A second important thing to note in this reading is how these 'diaspora' (dispersed) communities stay connected to the Mother Church in Jerusalem. Finally, it seems that the laying on of hands for the coming of the Spirit is something reserved for the Apostles.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 66

A theme of universalism—God's care for *all* people—is dominant in this psalm.

SECOND READING: 1Peter 3:15-18

These verses from 1Peter exhort the Christians to continue to remain faithful to Jesus even in the face of hostility. If questioned by authorities about their faith, they should be able to explain the hope that is in them, doing so with respect and reverence and not with antagonism. They are encouraged to be faithful Christians so that their witness will be effective. It is

not necessarily God's will that we should suffer, but it is God's will that we do good, that we do what is right and just, and if we experience suffering because of that, then we are called to suffer patiently, knowing that suffering is the cost of discipleship, and it is God's will that we join in his sufferings. Jesus suffered for the unrighteous to bring them to God. In a similar way, followers of Christ are called to suffer at the hands of the unrighteous and trust that God will use such suffering to bring the unrighteous to God.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: John 14:15-21

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: John 14:15-21

Jesus promises the 'Paraclete' to his disciples, ('Paraclete' literally means 'alongside of'). Its secondary meaning has to do with speaking, exhorting, begging, consoling, encouraging, instructing. In John, the Paraclete *witnesses* (15:6), *teaches* (14:26), *encourages* (16:6) *guides* (16:13) and *proves wrong* (16:8-11).

Notice Jesus says, “I will give you *another* Paraclete.” Jesus is the first one. The Paraclete is the “Spirit of Truth” who will remind the Apostles what Jesus taught, and help them to *understand* what he taught. In various situations, the Spirit will help Jesus’ disciples in different ways, e.g., if a disciple is in court, the Spirit will act as his inner defense attorney. In dealing with the world, the Spirit will act as his prosecutor.

The Spirit is the very presence of Jesus within us. Jesus has not orphaned us; rather, he is within us in a new way. The Spirit is a new presence of Jesus. The Spirit is our companion playing different roles at different times. For example, when we are sad, he is our *comfort*; when we are confused, he will guide us. This Spirit cannot be recognized without eyes of faith or without a heart of love. If we lack these qualities, the presence of the Holy Spirit will remain concealed from us. True knowledge of Jesus is always linked to loving Jesus.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what verse or image in the readings caught your attention or drew you in. Was there a verse or aspect of the readings that challenged you?

The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.

2. The first reading speaks of ‘unclean spirits.’ Name some unclean spirits operating in our world today. What unclean spirits might we have to deal with?

3. In the second reading, Peter says, “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.” If asked what gives you hope, how would you answer the question? How easy or hard is it for you to talk to others about our Catholic beliefs and practices?

4. How do you experience the Paraclete or the Holy Spirit?

5. Name one thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestions: Try to be more aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit within you.

In preparation for the Feast of Pentecost, consider making a *Novena to the Holy Spirit* beginning this Friday. A suggested novena is offered at the end of this week’s commentary.

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God’s Word and listened to others’ reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

PRAISING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Holy Spirit, help me to be more aware and responsive to your promptings in my daily life.*

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? What or for whom do we need to pray for?

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

*Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit,
that my thoughts may all be holy.*

*Act in me, O Holy Spirit,
that my work, too, may be holy.*

*Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit,
that I love but what is holy.*

*Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit,
to defend all that is holy.*

*Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit,
that I always may be holy.*

Amen.

- St. Augustine