

Bible Study

Fifth Sunday of Easter, cycle A

Opening Prayer: (Sign of the Cross) “Lord our God, during this Easter season you give us the joy of recalling the rising of Christ to new life and His establishment of his Church. May the words that we read today and the thoughts that we share increase our awareness of the many blessings which you bestow on your daughters and sons who have died and risen to new life with Him in Baptism. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Focusing Questions

1. How did your Risen Savior reveal himself to you this week?
2. Today’s readings present several images of Jesus: word, rock, cornerstone, way, truth, life. What are some of your favorite images or symbols of Christ?

Commentary before the First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 6:1-7

New ministries in the Church have always arisen out of genuine needs. The Hellenists in this story were Greek-speaking Jews, whereas the Hebrews were Jews who spoke Hebrew and/or Aramaic, as did Jesus. Complaints of discrimination are met swiftly by the Apostles, lest this disagreement destroy the unity of the new Church. Some scholars say that this new ministry is probably not the beginning of deacons as we know them, because the seven were commissioned only to distribute food. However, others maintain that these are the first deacons because both Philip and Stephen are presented later in Acts of the Apostles as preaching also.

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. Give reasons why widows in that culture needed to be provided for by the local community instead of being responsible for their own care, as is possible in our time.
2. Why didn’t the Apostles just take care of the widows themselves?
3. List the characteristics that qualified these men to be appointed to the new ministry.
4. Can you name tasks in parishes today that pastors frequently delegate to a deacon or to someone else in order to be freed up for ministry that only a priest can do?

Commentary before the Second Reading: 1 Peter 2:4-9

As we continue our serial reading from First Peter, we hear his description of the Church as a building made of living stones, with God as the stonemason and Jesus as the cornerstone upon which everything rests. However, he says that we are not to be as passive as stones! We are also, Peter says, a royal priesthood whose duty is to offer sacrifices to God – sacrifices of adoration and of good works.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. What are some sacrifices of good works which Christians can offer to God?
2. Did you mention the one in verse 9? In what sense can praise rightly be called a spiritual sacrifice?
3. Verse 9 makes references to quotations from the Old Testament. Does your Bible have a footnote that explains the Old Testament comparisons that Saint Peter is making for us and for his readers?
4. In what way do non-believers stumble over Christ, as if over a rock in their path?

Commentary before the Gospel Reading: John 14:1-12

For the final Sundays of the Easter season this year we will hear from Saint John’s account of Jesus’ discourse to his Apostles at the Last Supper. In John’s Gospel, the primary teaching of Jesus is that he came to earth to reveal to humanity what God is really like, to show them the truth. Like today, some believed, some did not.

Read the Gospel Reading aloud.

1. Which verse in this reading stands out for you?
2. When Jesus says, “Do not let your hearts be troubled,” he is not commanding us not to grieve over sad farewells; what is the real message in his words here?
3. The Church has always taught that it is possible to believe in God without knowing about Jesus or without believing in Jesus. In that case, what is the advantage of also believing that Jesus is God-became-human?
4. Then Jesus says, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” Look up Exodus 24:9-11, and then try to put into simple words what Jesus is trying to tell us.

Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives

1. How do you understand Jesus' assertion, "I am the way...No one comes to the Father except through me"? Does your answer reflect what you read in question #3 above?
2. Have you ever felt left out of Church life or confused about the Christian message? How was that question resolved or how could that be resolved?
3. This Gospel reading is often used in Masses of Christian Burial. What makes it appropriate for a funeral?
4. What does it mean for you when we say that the Church is "rock-solid?"
5. How can you assist someone who finds Jesus to be a "stumbling block" whose commands are too difficult?
6. Imagine the Church as a large, magnificent building. If Jesus is the cornerstone and we are other living stones, where in the "building" have you been placed? Why do you say that?
7. As these readings reveal, the Scripture frequently calls for a two-fold spirituality that balances a personal relationship with God and a life of service to those around us. What kinds of service to others do you find yourself frequently call to do?
8. Are any of your acts of service done within the parish in order to lighten the load of your pastoral leader?

Closing Prayer:

Today is a day the Lord has made, alleluia!

Let us be glad and rejoice, alleluia!

Tell all nations about the saving power of God, alleluia!

Fill the earth with the echo of God's praises, alleluia!

Give glory to God the Father, to God the Son, and to God the Holy Spirit;

Give glory to God who is unchanging for all eternity. Amen. Alleluia!

(Sign of the Cross)