

Bible Study

Sixth 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. All three readings for this Sunday speak of the Holy Spirit. Tell about a couple ways you chose to let the Spirit of God shine out through your life this past week?
2. And when did you also see the Holy Spirit acting in another person?

Commentary before the First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 8:5-8, 14-17

The Philip in the story we are about to read is not the Apostle Philip; he is the Philip who was one of the seven men “filled with the Spirit and wisdom” who were selected to assist the Apostles with the distribution of food and goods to the needy. When a severe persecution broke out in Jerusalem shortly after his selection, he fled north to Samaria. Although Philip came there seeking safety, God had other things in mind for the new Church.

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. Long before this, during a foreign occupation, many of the people of Samaria had begun to mix the Jewish faith with pagan practices, after some intermarried with the foreigners. What was Philip’s reaction to this?
2. Saint Luke, the author, is telling how a person became a member of the Church at that time. Put these 4 elements in the order that they happened then: a) receiving the Holy Spirit, b) hearing about Jesus, c) laying on of hands, d) baptism with water.
3. How different is that from the order in which they usually happen today?
4. Philip, the equivalent of a deacon today, could not lay hands on those he had baptized, because he was not an apostle nor a presbyter (“priest”). Who did complete the initiation by laying on hands (i.e. administering Confirmation)?

Commentary before the Second Reading: 1 Peter 3:15-18

In the New Testament the word “hope” is often used to mean “expectation of the resurrection from the dead.” For most people at the time, that would have been a new concept. As we continue reading portions of the First Letter of Saint Peter, we hear that we proclaim this kind of “hope” in 2 ways – by explaining what we believe and by conducting ourselves as if we truly hope to enter heaven after dying. People will notice.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. When he writes, “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts,” what do you think the author means?
2. According to the reading, how should we respond to a person who does not understand our faith?
3. And, how should we respond to pressure or ridicule of our faith as Christians?
4. How does the Holy Spirit help us in those situations referred to in questions 2 and 3?
5. Why doesn’t God protect us, instead of allowing us to be ridiculed or persecuted for acting like a Christian?
6. Look again at verse 18. Why does a Christian not fear death?

Commentary before the Gospel Reading: John 14:15-21

We read again this week from Jesus’ discourse to his Apostles at the Last Supper. This selection gives a good explanation of the Trinity: the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are one God; they exist in a perfect unity of love for each other; and, although each is a distinct Person, each is fully God and each reveals the presence of all three.

Read the Gospel Reading aloud.

1. Is there a specific phrase in this reading that touches your heart?
2. According to Jesus, what is the proof that we love God? Do you agree?
3. When Jesus speaks of “the world,” what does he mean?

4. To what does verse 19 refer? Can you see how that would have been impossible for the disciples to understand until after it happened?
5. At that point in time what might have been their limited understanding of being filled with his Spirit?
6. What prerequisite is there, according to Jesus, to being filled with his Spirit?

Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives

1. Which is a more intimate way of being with Jesus – to walk next to Him as the disciples did, or to be filled with his Spirit? (There is a correct answer, according to Jesus' words in the Gospel reading!)
2. What difference is there, in your opinion, between believing that God is always with you and believing that God is within you?
3. Do you think of the commandments as obligations, or as burdens which limit us, or as ways to love God?
4. Explain the difference between obeying a commandment because you don't want to break a law and obeying it because you love the one who gave it as a law.
5. If keeping the commandments is one end of a spectrum and living the commandments is the other end, where on the connecting line would you place yourself?
6. How is it possible to be the unique person that God created you to be if you are always just living out God's commandments rather than choosing what you'd like to do?
7. How does the Holy Spirit help us to live the commandments as God desires?
8. How well do you feel you could defend your Christian beliefs to a challenger? (If you feel a need to be able to do that better, how could you improve in that area of Christian life?)

Closing Prayer:

“Almighty God, you are the creator of all that exists, and your greatest gift to us is taking on our humanity in order to die for our sins. Help us to live our lives in a way that proclaims your existence and draws others closer to you. We believe you will make this possible through your Holy Spirit living within us, for you are Lord forever and ever. Amen. Alleluia!”

(Sign of the Cross)