

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
Seventh Sunday of Easter
May 29, 2022**

SCRIPTURES:

Acts 7:55-60

Revelation 22:12-14,16-17,20

John 17:20-26

Jesus receives Stephen into heaven.

We urgently long for Jesus to return.

Jesus prays for us who have come to believe.

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

John:

The Great Priestly Prayer of Jesus is drawing to a close, as is his very life here in the flesh. His plea for his disciples becomes more urgent. Now, it is not just the “glory” which is his as the Father completes the work for which he sent Jesus in the first place. Remember, “glory” refers to the manifestation of God’s presence, of God’s power, and God’s love in the work of suffering, dying, and rising that Jesus will undergo. At this point, the disciples are pulled into this same “glory.” The presence, power, and love of Christ will be shown in their suffering, dying, and rising from now on. They themselves will become manifestation of God and of Christ in the world. Christ will continue his work of salvation in and through them. That is what he prays they be ready for.

The Prayer of Jesus is more than just intercession. Would that have not been enough in itself to have the Son of the Most High God plead to his Father on our behalf? But more than that, the Prayer of Jesus also constitutes a revelation, a new gift for “the faith of the community.” The revelation is this: God working in and through his Son now is being asked to do the same works through the lives of Jesus’ disciples. They must become the embodiment of all that was given him by the Father.

All this becomes couched in the language of unity. Just as the Father is in the Son in this world, so now may the Son be made manifest to the world by working through the unified body of his disciples. The identification of the disciples with Christ has to be shown in their complete communion with one another in love and in peace. There can be no greater and more effective sign that Jesus is the Christ sent by the Father than the witness of his disciples living in intimate union with one another. That is the one tremendous miracle that only God can perform. That sinful, selfish human beings are able to live in love and peace with one another has to be the work of God. That is the proof that Christ has come from the Father.

Conversely, the disunity of the Church, the squabbling and backstabbing of the so-called disciples of Jesus, will give rise to the conviction that their message is all false. To this day, the fractured body of Christ seen in the separations among the various groups of Christians, seen in their outright hostility to one another at times, can be taken as evidence by those who do not believe that the whole Gospel cannot be true. The seamless garment of the Lord lies around, torn to shreds by the disagreements among the Christian people. And the world says, “See, we told you it would not work!”

Acts:

Stephen comes on the scene in the New Testament as one of the seven chosen to oversee the distribution of food to widows among the Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem. These men have come to be called deacons in Church tradition, but the New Testament does not call them that. They serve in some limited function under the supervision of the apostles who are primarily given to prayer and to preaching. Stephen enrages the other Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem when he proclaims that Jesus has been exalted at the right hand of the Father, a phrase that means that Jesus is equal to God in majesty and in power. The author of Acts seems to have drawn a deliberate parallel between what happened to Jesus and what happens to Stephen. Like Jesus, he asks that his executioners be forgiven their sin. The scene also serves to introduce Saul who approves of the execution, goes on to persecute the followers of Jesus, and eventually becomes the great apostle to the Gentiles.

Revelation:

We come to the end of our annual readings from the Book of Revelation. The Church needs to hear one more time who Jesus is. He shares in the Father's very titles: "The Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End of all history." A final blessing is bestowed on those who have kept themselves pure for God; that is, uncontaminated by the sordid sin of idolatry. The way to do that is to keep washing one's robe in the blood of the Lamb. Now, as never before, the final coming of Christ can be eagerly awaited. He has promised that he would come. We cry out to him, "Come now, Lord Jesus! Come!"

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever asked yourself what kind of person you would have become if you had not known the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you ever tried to imagine what the practical impact has been upon you that the Lord Jesus and his love for you were revealed to you? List and share some of the blessings that you have received from knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior. Tell others how you have become aware of God's love and mercy for you through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in your heart.

2. Are you aware that the "glory" that was in Jesus has been handed on to the Church? Not the kind of glory that expresses itself in pride and self-centeredness but the kind that shows that the works of salvation are being worked quietly and with humility by the ministries of the Church. Identify some of the works of salvation that are taking place every day in the Church community. How is the "glory" given to the Church being shown by the works undertaken by your parish, by your family, by your faith-sharing group?

3. Discuss the practical impact that results from disunity in the Church. How have factions and disagreements had a negative impact upon your parish? What about the divided witness that is being given by separate churches and denominations in your community? The struggle between so-called "loyal Catholics" and Catholics who are allegedly "disloyal to the pope" causes deep pain in the body of the Catholic Church at this time. Are you aware of these struggles?

PRAYER

**God our Savior, hear us and give us hope,
that the glory you have given Christ
will be given to the Church, his body.**

(From the **Sacramentary**, for the 7th Sunday of Easter)

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE:

Christ prayed for his followers at the Last Supper. He prayed that all those whom he had been given by the Father should remain united to one another as a sign that God had sent him. When these words were being written, the followers of Christ were already experiencing deep wounds of division, disharmony, separations, and alienation from one another. It was not just a happenstance that the Gospel writers happened to remember these words of Christ in favor of Church unity.

The Church is blessed with the gift of unity in its Head. There is only one Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. There is only one Holy Spirit imparted to be body of the Church to give it life and to give it its very being in Christ. The unity of the Church does not depend on its members. If that were so, there would be as many churches as there are individual members! But the unity of the Church comes from its source, God, who gives the Church its very life.

The Church finds unity in the sources of its nurture: one word of God, one faith in Christ the Risen Lord, one source for sacraments and grace.

The Church has to be structured in its visible organization so as to give evidence of its inner unity in the Spirit of Christ. The whole Church professes the one creed that gives expression to the one faith by which it lives. The Church is founded on one baptism that is the same for all: rich and poor, the powerful and the powerless, the educated and the illiterate. There is one structure of leadership and governance, entrusted primarily to the bishops and to their assistants. There is one head of the visible Church, our Holy Father, the pope, Bishop of Rome and successor of Peter.

“From the beginning, this one Church had been marked by a great *diversity* which comes from both the variety of God’s gifts and the diversity of those who receive them.” Unity does not mean uniformity. There are varieties of cultures, of races, of gifts given to people by God for the enriching of the body of Christ. Many segments of the Church have their own particular traditions and heritage which enrich the whole Church. Various devotional practices are held sacred within the unity of the sacramental system.

(See: **The Catechism: #811-822**)

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