

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 25, 2025**

SCRIPTURES:

Acts 15:1-2,22-29

Revelation 21:10-14,22-23

John 14:23-29

Observing the Law of Moses is not required.

In the New Jerusalem, the Lord is the only Light.

Obedience in Jesus Christ will make him dwell here.

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

John:

When John wrote his Gospel, perhaps around the year 90 AD, many needed some special assurance that Jesus was not too far away, that he was present to them in their distressing sufferings and in persecution. The whole Gospel proclaims that Christ is still very much present in the Church and will not let its members suffer beyond endurance. In fact, Christ sustains them through the power of the Holy Spirit who is usually called the *Paraclete* in this Gospel. In Greek, the word "Spirit," as in "Holy Spirit," is an impersonal power or presence. The proper pronoun referring to the Spirit is "it." Whereas, the word for "Paraclete" is a personal word. Its proper pronoun is "He." That is very reassuring in a subtle way.

Some scholars suggest that the whole Priestly Prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper in the Gospel of John was not part of the original Gospel but an addition by a different author from within the same community as the original author, as was Chapter 21 which is clearly added on by some other writer. Be that as it may, in all its parts, the whole Gospel was accepted as Scripture by the authority of the Church. If this part was added after the original had been drafted and used for some time in the community of John, all the more reason we should seek what meaning surely was intended for the people of that time and for us.

To obey Jesus is what will make him abide in powerful presence within the community of faith. To love as he loved becomes the vehicle or the sacrament of his loving presence. When Christians love one another, Jesus has to be present to make that love real and effective. We cannot obey the commandment of love without becoming instruments of Jesus' presence.

The coming of the Messiah is realized in Jesus of Nazareth who is the Christ, the Anointed One of God. The Second Coming of Christ is realized in the faith community where the Lord abides in continuing presence. Jesus was challenged to show who he really was. He said his works speak for him: He does the works of God. The community of John wanted the Church to prove who it really was. In this Gospel, the Church answers: If we do the works of Christ, then Christ is truly present in the Church.

This whole convoluted passage in John answers one question: Is Jesus Christ truly present still in the Church? The Gospel answers: Look at the works of love done in and by the Church community. Where there is love, there is God. The love of Christ cannot be exercised by the members of the Church if Christ is not present in and among them. It seems to take the author forever to say this. It takes us forever to understand it! And to live up to it!

“The Father is greater than I” is merely a Jewish way of saying that Jesus was sent by the Father. The messenger is not greater than the One who sent him. To have Jesus say that the Father is greater merely says that the Father sent Jesus to do the works of the Father in this world. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are united in works, in presence, and in being.

Acts:

It did not take very long for the early Church to run into (or run after) controversies. Reality set in all too soon. Despite its vaunted unity in charity, there could be differences of opinion as to pastoral strategy and differences of conviction as to the essentials of the Christian faith. The one explosive issue which did not take too long to stun the community was over the admitting of Gentiles to the fellowship, especially to “table fellowship” at the eucharistic meal. Those who had come to Christ from Judaism continued to worship at the Temple and to observe the dietary laws from the heritage of Moses. Of course, Gentiles did not. Now, they are expected to sit with one another and share a meal? This was a make or break issue, reaching into the depths of the unconscious with intimations of revulsion over “unclean,” “uncircumcised,” etc. After consulting the Holy Spirit, the Church felt authorized to decide something that Jesus had left undecided. This will become a most significant step in the whole matter of development of doctrine. The Church can decide!

Revelation:

In the New Jerusalem, there is no Temple for God to live in. The whole city is God’s Temple. There are no lights except the Light that comes from Christ, its teacher. God’s presence cannot be limited to one place; God cannot be contained in a building. The vision in the Book of Revelation harkens back to the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8-14) with its peace. There are overtones of the great vision of the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 40-48) with its splendor and refreshing waters.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why does Jesus say that he gives peace at the same time as he gives the Holy Spirit? What is the connection between the presence of the Spirit and peace in the lives of those who have received that Spirit? Has God given you peace? Why are you so often distressed? Perhaps, it is because we fail to love others the way Jesus asked that we should. Do you think that loving others has the power to bring peace into your heart? Maybe Jesus was a better therapist than we give him credit for!

2. How come Jesus can command us not to be distressed or fearful? Are these not spontaneous emotions over which we have no control? Do you suppose that Jesus can say this because he is the Divine Physician who has the antidote to give along with the command? Do you think that if we really surrender into the care of the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, we will be filled with the presence of God the Father and of his Son, Jesus Christ, and have no need for fear? We fear and feel distressed only when we are threatened. What if we do not feel threatened?

3. The world can only give peace as the absence of conflict. Jesus gives peace as the full reconciliation of all that was torn apart. Talk about the times when you have felt most at peace in your life. What were the circumstances that made this so? Can you share what that peace was like? Can you share what led to that feeling of peace? Is there some way to regain that? Are there ways to recreate the circumstances that helped you feel the presence and the power of God?

PRAYER

**God our Father,
make us joyful
in the Ascension of your Son.
May we follow him into the new creation,
for his Ascension is our glory and our hope.**
(For Ascension Day)

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE:

We have been discussing the “marks” of the Church in this space during the last several weeks. The Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. In ages past, we talked about the “marks” of the Church in a discipline called “apologetics.” We sought to prove that the Catholic Church was truly the Church of Jesus Christ. That Church that was endowed with all these “marks” was indeed the Church that Christ founded. That is still true, of course, but today it seems more appropriate to identify these characteristics of the Church as wonderful gifts that Christ gave to the Church, that are really verified in the life of the Church but that also need to be constantly enriched and purified, since we are more aware of the truly human dimensions of the Church with its lack of perfection in these gifts.

The Church is *holy* because the Church is the body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Christ is holy; the Spirit is holy; so the Church is holy. But the Church is also in need of further sanctification since we are the sinners who make up the body of the Church. Each one of us still needs further perfection and further purification. The Church always must become more holy in its members. Its Head is the All-Holy One; its members are always perfectible. It is a curious mystery that the Church possesses within itself the power to make its members holy: the word of God and the sacraments.

The Church is made holy by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Christ lives on in the Church and continually cleanses it for himself so that the Church might become his fitting Bride. The Church is not only sanctified by Christ but becomes a sanctifying agent on his behalf. The Church having been purified of sin can serve to purify its own members and all who come into contact with it. To be in the Church means to be in Christ; that is always purifying.

The love of Christ by which the Church lives makes it possible for the Church to love in his name and to bring the perfecting power of his love to bear on itself and to all to whom the Church ministers. Love will make holy whoever and whatever it touches, because love is of God. Love brings sanctification to all who are in the Church and to all who are the object of the Church’s concern. The love of Christ always creates holiness. We are the saints on earth; those canonized by the Church’s authority are the saints.

·
(See: **The Catechism: #823-829**)

© 2017 Rev. Clement D. Thibodeau. All rights reserved.