

FIRST READING – A EASTER 5

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Now during those days,
when the disciples were increasing in number,
the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews
because their widows were being neglected
in the daily distribution of food.
And the twelve called together
the whole community of the disciples and said,
“It is not right that we should neglect the word of God
in order to wait on tables.
Therefore, brothers,
select from among yourselves seven men of good standing,
full of the Spirit and of wisdom,
whom we may appoint to this task,
while we, for our part,
will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.”
What they said pleased the whole community,
and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit,
together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor,
Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a convert of Antioch.
They had these men stand before the apostles,
who prayed and laid their hands on them.
The word of God continued to spread;
the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem,
and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

Prochorus = PRAK-uh-ruhs
Nicanor = nigh-KAY-nawr
Timon = TIGH-mahn
Parmenas = PAHR-mih-nuhs
Nicolas = NIK-oh-luhs
Antioch = AN-tih-ahk

Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING – A EASTER 5

A reading from the first letter of Saint Peter.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Beloved:

Come to the Lord, a living stone,
though rejected by human beings
yet chosen and precious in God's sight.

Like living stones,
let yourselves be built into a spiritual house,
to be a holy priesthood,
to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God
through Jesus Christ.

For it stands in Scripture:

“See, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

To you then who believe, he is precious;
but for those who do not believe,

“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the very head of the corner,” and

“A stone that makes them stumble,
and a rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they disobey the word,
as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood,
a holy nation, God's own people,
in order that you may proclaim
the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness
into his marvellous light.

Pause for **THREE** seconds

then look up at the people

and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – A EASTER 5

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord

Jesus said to his disciples:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.

Believe in God, believe also in me.

In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.

If it were not so, would I have told you
that I go to prepare a place for you?

And if I go and prepare a place for you,

I will come again and will take you to myself,
so that where I am, there you may be also.

And you know the way to the place where I am going.”

Thomas said to him,

“Lord, we do not know where you are going.

How can we know the way?”

Jesus said to him,

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me.

If you know me, you will know my Father also.

From now on you do know him and have seen him.

Philip said to him,

“Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”



GOSPEL READING (CTD.) – A EASTER 5

Jesus said to him,
“Have I been with you all this time, Philip,
and you still do not know me?
Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.
How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?
Do you not believe
that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?
The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own;
but the Father who dwells in me does his works.
Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me;
but if you do not,
then believe me because of the works themselves.
Very truly, I tell you,
the one who believes in me
will also do the works that I do and, in fact,
will do greater works than these,
because I am going to the Father.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

Reading I: Acts 6:1-7

For the New Testament scholar, several problems are raised by this story from Acts 6.

The main one is that although we are told that the Seven were appointed to “serve tables” in order to allow the apostles to give their undivided attention to the ministry of the word, nevertheless the only members of the Seven whom we hear about after their appointment turn out to be themselves notable ministers of the word, namely, Stephen and Philip.

Probably this confusion is due to the author of Luke-Acts, who sees in the appointment of the Seven the institution of a subordinate ministry (deacons?—he uses the verb *diakonein*, meaning “serve” but does not actually call them deacons).

In actual fact, however, the Seven must have been more than that. They must have been, in a real sense, leaders of the growing Greek-speaking part of the community.

In that case, the real concern of the apostles in recognizing the Seven would have been to prevent a split between the Greek-speaking and the Aramaic-speaking Christians (Hellenists and Hebrews).

Perhaps even the act of ordination—laying on of hands with prayer—reflects the practice at the time Luke wrote rather than that of the earliest church (see also Acts 13:3 and Acts 14:23, which are probably equally anachronistic).

Nevertheless, ordination by the laying on of hands with prayer must have been introduced in a Palestinian-Jewish environment, for it reflects the synagogue practice of ordaining elders—a fact that has even led some modern scholars to suppose that the Seven were appointed presbyters (elders) rather than deacons.

But this is improbable. The truth more likely is that we have here two levels of interpretation:

(1) the original historical situation, that is, the tensions mentioned above and the recognition of the leaders of the Greek-speaking group by the Twelve, thus averting a breach between the two parties;

(2) the origins of a subordinate ministry.

Responsorial Psalm 33:1-2, 4-5, 18-19*

As a psalm of thanksgiving for the mighty acts of God in salvation history, this selection is appropriate for the Easter season, particularly since the last stanza refers to deliverance from death.

Originally, of course, this was a reference to deliverance from some natural calamity, probably famine, which is mentioned in the last line.

In the context of this Easter liturgy, this can be given a full Christian sense. In his resurrection Christ has indeed delivered the souls (lives) of his people from death.

Reading II: 1 Peter 2:4-9

We recall that 1 Peter is full of baptismal references. Originally, perhaps, this passage was an instruction for baptismal candidates.

It tells them the nature of the community into which they are being admitted. It is a temple (the place of God's presence) made up of living stones (that is, men and women). It is, like the people of the old covenant (Ex 19:6), a holy or royal priesthood, a distinct race and nation.

Special stress is laid upon the priestly aspect of the community, for only this aspect is spelled out in terms of implied functions.

The community expresses its priestly character by offering up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ and declares the wonderful deeds of him who calls it out of darkness into light.

Between this exposition of the nature of the Church there is inserted a string of Old Testament quotations, connected by the theme of the stone (Is 28:16; Ps 118:22; Is 8:14-15) and applied to the person and work of Christ. These quotations were evidently suggested by the reference to the composition of the church out of living stones.

This reminds the author that Christians, as living stones, are joined together by Christ, who is the cornerstone. Remove the prosaic quotations and we have what may have been an early (baptismal?) hymn about the church.

This is the locus classicus in the New Testament on the theme of the church's priesthood. It was, of course, the passage that inspired the Reformers to reassert the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Though it was understandable, it was a pity that they had to assert it polemically against the late medieval doctrines of ministerial priesthood, obscuring thereby the priestly understanding of the ministry.

A book by an American Lutheran scholar, John H. Elliott, has sought to cut the ground from under this polemic by insisting that (1) there is a basic difference between the priesthood of the church as predicated in Ex 19:6 and the cultic priesthood of Leviticus, and (2) the sacrifice offered by the Christian community, which is not cultic but ethical—the living of a Christian life in the world.

It is a helpful insight that the priesthood of the church is based on Exodus rather than Leviticus. This protects the teaching of the letter to the Hebrews that Christ has once for

all replaced the sacrifices of the Levitical priesthood by his redemptive act, and that any priesthood we predicate of the church or its ministry can never abrogate the “once-for-allness” of his sacrifice and the uniqueness of his priesthood.

Nor can it be denied that the author of 1 Peter sees the Exodus-type sacrifice of the church as being actualized and made visible to the world in the quality of its ethical life.

Nevertheless, I wonder whether we can exclude cultic ideas altogether from this passage. The “spiritual sacrifices” offered by the church do not exclude the “declaring” (or recital) of the wonderful deeds of God in salvation history.

Here is the primary focus of the church’s priesthood, and this is what the church does in the liturgy. Of course, this issues or should issue in a lifestyle in the world. But its cultic basis must be preserved or the whole conception of sacrifice will evaporate.

The great Eucharistic Prayer (traditionally called the “canon” in the West and the “anaphora” in the East) is the occasion par excellence when we “show forth,” “declare” or recite before God in thanksgiving God’s mighty acts of salvation.

This is the primary work of the church. For this we are baptized, and for this we renew our baptismal vows at Easter.

Gospel: John 14:1-12

What C. H. Dodd wrote some years ago about the First Epistle of John is equally applicable to the discourses in the Fourth Gospel:

The argument is not closely articulated. There is little direct progression. The writer ‘thinks around’ a succession of related topics.

The movement of thought has not inaptly been described as ‘spiral,’ for the development of a theme often brings us back almost to the starting point—almost, but not quite, for there is a slight shift which provides the transition to a fresh theme.”

This special pattern makes an analysis of a passage like today’s Gospel very difficult. A number of themes arise in succession:

1. Jesus’ impending departure, that is, his death and exaltation.
2. (linked by the key word “way”) Jesus as the revelation and the way to the Father.
3. Following this, a dialogue with Philip unfolding this christological affirmation: Jesus as the revelation of the Father, a reference to the words and works of Jesus as the words and works of the Father, words and works that make him the revelation of the Father.

4. A challenge to believe Jesus, preferably because of encounter with his whole person or, if not that, at least because of his works.

5. The promise that believers will do even greater works because of Jesus' departure—which brings us back almost to where we started.

Obviously there is much in this passage that could be developed for a homily. The liturgical season, with Ascension Day approaching, suggests that we read it because of what it says about Jesus' departure to the Father.

No doubt when the farewell discourse was first chosen in the traditional Lectionary for the lessons of the old "great forty days," our ancestors equated this departure with the ascension as a separate event and thought of the discourses almost as though they were delivered by the risen Christ during the great forty days.

Our understanding of the Easter event today, as well as of the farewell discourses, is more sophisticated. For us, the "going" of Jesus to the Father is the whole complex event, celebrated throughout the great fifty days—his resurrection, exaltation, appearances, and the gift of the Spirit.

And the farewell discourses themselves, while doubtless enshrining the traditional sayings of Jesus, are meditations of the Johannine community upon the meaning of this total complex of events.

For us, the important message of today's pericope is that the risen, exalted Christ continues his words and works in his church.

Are these "greater works"—the word and the sacraments—greater because they will actually mediate the divine salvation, whereas the words and works of the earthly Jesus only pointed forward to, and prepared for, the central saving acts?

His departure from earth was preparatory for his continual coming to his church.

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