

FIRST READING – A EASTER 6

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

In those days:

Philip went down to the city of Samaria
and proclaimed the Christ to them.

The crowds with one accord listened eagerly
to what was said by Philip,
hearing and seeing the signs that he did,
for unclean spirits, crying with loud shrieks,
came out of many who were possessed;
and many others who were paralysed or lame were cured.
So there was great joy in that city.

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard
that Samaria had accepted the word of God,
they sent Peter and John to them.

The two went down and prayed for them
that they might receive the Holy Spirit;
(for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them;
they had only been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus).
Then Peter and John laid their hands on them,
and they received the Holy Spirit.



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 6

A reading from the first letter of Saint Peter.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Beloved:

In your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord.
Always be ready to make your defence
to anyone who demands from you an accounting
for the hope that is in you;
yet do it with gentleness and reverence.
Keep your conscience clear,
so that, when you are maligned,
those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ
may be put to shame.
For it is better to suffer for doing good,
if suffering should be God's will,
than to suffer for doing evil.
For Christ also suffered for sins once for all,
the righteous for the unrighteous,
in order to bring you to God.
He was put to death in the flesh,
but made alive in the spirit.



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 6

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:

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

And I will ask the Father,

and he will give you another Advocate,

to be with you forever.

This is the Spirit of truth,

whom the world cannot receive,

because it neither sees him nor knows him.

You know him, because he stays with you,

and he will be in you.

I will not leave you orphaned;

I am coming to you.

In a little while the world will no longer see me,

but you will see me;

because I live, you also will live.

On that day you will know that I am in my Father,

and you in me, and I in you.

The one who has my commandments and keeps them

is the one who loves me;

and the one who loves me will be loved by my Father,

and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

Reading I: Acts 8:5-8, 14-17

The Acts of the Apostles is planned to trace the expansion of the Church's mission from Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The campaign undertaken by Philip, one of the seven, after the martyrdom of Stephen marks, for Luke, a decisive stage in the execution of this plan (Samaria).

Equally important for Luke is the concern that each successive stage should receive the imprimatur of the original Jerusalem community and its apostles. Hence the curious anomaly that in this story baptism does not convey the gift of the Spirit, as is normally the case in Acts, but has to await the arrival of Peter and John to lay hands on the Samaritan converts.

In later times, especially in Anglican thought during the past century and in revisions of the Book of Common Prayer produced in the 1920's, this passage was taken as the Magna Carta for the episcopal confirmation of children baptized in infancy.

This exegesis has thus passed into the theology of the average Anglican parish priest without question. Let it be said with all emphasis that such an interpretation has no foundation in this passage, in the rest of the New Testament, or in the early Fathers.

The author of Luke-Acts knows nothing of "confirmation" as a separate rite, distinct from baptism, performed by the apostles or their successors (however justifiable such a development may have been in later times, granted the practice of infant baptism).

Rather, he is concerned with one of his major theological themes—the maintenance of the ties between the expanding mission of the Church and the Mother Church at Jerusalem as the center of salvation history.

Responsorial Psalm 66:1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 16, 20

Precisely the same selection of verses from Psalm 66 is used on the fourteenth Sunday of the year in series C. The only variation here is the optional substitution of the Easter Alleluia for the refrain.

However, this is an excellent example of the way in which the liturgical use of Scripture is itself an exegetical act.

The psalm originally celebrated some historical deliverance of the nation. It picks up the traditional language of the Exodus: "He turned the sea into dry land; men passed through the river on foot" (stanza 3).

Now, in this season, the mighty acts thus described as an exodus become the resurrection of Christ and our participation in it through baptism.

Reading II: 1 Peter 3:15-18

The baptismal material in the first part of 1 Peter, which runs through 1 Peter 4:12, includes warnings of possible persecution (after 1 Peter 4:12 the tone changes and the persecution becomes actual). The references to persecution in the present passage are contingent in character: “Always be prepared... when you are abused... if that should be God’s will.”

The newly baptized, thrilled at their admission to all the privileges of the people of God as detailed in last Sunday’s Second Reading, are here reminded that it will not be smooth sailing all the time. They must know what they are in for.

Indeed, how could it be otherwise, since the Christian life is a following in the footsteps of Christ? That is why the passage ends with a quotation from an early Christian hymn about the death and resurrection of Christ (the hymn continues beyond the present reading through 1 Peter 3:22).

The words “the righteous for the unrighteous” are thought to have been added to the hymn so as to adapt it to its present position (see 1 Peter 3:14,16), in which the passion of Christ is treated as an example for the persecuted Christians to imitate.

In this way we see how a hymn receives new applications by being taken up successively into new contexts, namely (1) into a baptism homily; (2) into a letter warning Christians for whom persecution is an impending reality; (3) as used in today’s liturgy, where the whole passage receives yet another interpretation.

Gospel: John 14:15-21

We see here the same kind of spiral thought that characterizes the farewell discourse throughout and of which we spoke in our comments on last Sunday’s gospel. The points made are:

1. Love of Christ means obedience to his commandments.
2. The promise of the Paraclete (RSV: “Counselor”) sent by the Father in response to the prayer of the Son.
3. The Spirit, whom the world cannot receive, will dwell in the community.
4. The coming of the Spirit is equivalent to the return of the Son and almost completely fulfills the primitive expectation of the parousia.
5. The world will no longer see the Christ, but the community will (a) see him, (b) live because he lives, (c) know the mutual indwelling of Christ with the Father and of Christ with the community.

6. This indwelling is a relationship of mutual love that includes obedience to Christ's commandments.

It will again be noted how point 6 brings us full circle to where we were at point 1. Yet, the spiral leads to an enrichment of understanding.

The Christian life is not an external observance of Christ's commandments but an intense relationship of the community to the three Persons of the Trinity, each with a specific role to play in this relationship.

The Spirit conveys the presence of the Son, who reveals the Father.

But this intense personal relationship is not dissolved into mere emotion; it is concretely and soberly manifested in a life of obedience to Christ's commandments.

The departure of Jesus does not mean that he is now absent. It means his ever-renewed presence through the coming of the Spirit to the community. That is the Easter message of this Gospel reading.

Reginald H. Fuller