

FIRST READING – B 5 EASTER

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

When Saul had come to Jerusalem,
he attempted to join the disciples;
and they were all afraid of him,
for they did not believe that he was a disciple.
But Barnabas took him,
brought him to the apostles,
and described for them how on the road he had seen the Lord,
who had spoken to him,
and how in Damascus Saul had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus.
So Saul went in and out among them in Jerusalem,
speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.
He spoke and argued with the Hellenists;
but they were attempting to kill him.
When the believers learned of it,
they brought Saul down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.
Meanwhile the Church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria
had peace and was built up.
Living in the fear of the Lord
and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit,
it increased in numbers.

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

◆ ◆ ◆
The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING – B 5 EASTER

A reading from the first letter of Saint John.

Pause - and look up at the assembly

Little children, let us love,
not in word or speech, but in truth and action.
And by this we will know that we are from the truth
and will reassure our hearts before him
whenever our hearts condemn us;
for God is greater than our hearts,
and God knows everything.
Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us,
we have boldness before God;
and we receive from him whatever we ask,
because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.
And this is his commandment,
that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ
and love one another, just as he has commanded us.
Whoever obeys his commandments abides in him,
and he abides in them.
And by this we know that he abides in us,
by the Spirit that he has given us.

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

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – B 5 EASTER

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:

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower.

He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit.

Every branch that bears fruit

he prunes to make it bear more fruit.

You have already been cleansed

by the word that I have spoken to you.

Abide in me as I abide in you.

Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself

unless it abides in the vine,

neither can you unless you abide in me.

I am the vine, you are the branches.

Whoever abides in me and I in them bear much fruit,

because apart from me you can do nothing.

Whoever does not abide in me

is thrown away like a branch and withers;

such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you,

ask for whatever you wish,

and it will be done for you.

My Father is glorified by this,

that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

Reading I: Acts 9:26-31

At first sight this passage seems to be a straightforward piece of historical narrative, creating no problems of interpretation but yielding very little material for preaching. A comparison of this account of Paul's first visit to Jerusalem with his own account in [Galatians 1:18-19](#) reveals, however, certain major discrepancies.

Paul's own account emphasizes his entire independence of the Jerusalem apostles. On his first post-conversion visit, he merely saw Cephas and accidentally ran into James during his fifteen days' stay.

Luke gives a very different account: Paul was anxious to join up with the apostles, who in turn were reluctant to receive the ex-persecutor; only when their scruples were overcome by Barnabas did they agree to accept him. Once introduced, however, Paul "went in and out with them," a phrase that in Luke means intimate companionship.

"By the very fact that he—known to many in Jerusalem as the Christian-baiter—allowed himself to be seen walking arm in arm, as it were, in the streets and lanes of the city with the leaders of the Nazarene sect . . . Saul made open confession of his faith in Jesus" (Zahn).

We must certainly allow for some one-sidedness on Paul's part in Galatians 1:18-19. Obviously he *was* dependent up to a point on the tradition he had received from those who were Christians before him. His visit to Cephas may have been precisely for the purpose of obtaining information about Jesus, for in [1 Corinthians 15:3-7](#) Paul makes it clear that he did depend on tradition for certain Christian traditions about events that happened before his apostolic call.

Luke's account must for the most part be regarded as an expression of Lucan theology rather than purely historical narration. For Luke, Paul is a model for the Church in his own day, in the subapostolic age. It is only when the Church remains in fellowship with the apostles—walking arm in arm with them, as it were—that it remains apostolic, preaching the same gospel as the apostles preached.

The final paragraph suggests that it was not the expansion of the Church in itself that concerned Luke, but the fact that the apostolic message of the resurrection of Christ was spread so far and wide. It is not growth that matters, but what kind of growth.

Responsorial Psalm: 22:26-27, 28, 30, 31-32

Psalm 22, as we know, is the passion psalm *par excellence*. But it is really a passion-and-resurrection psalm. Verses 1-21 are about the suffering of the righteous servant of God, verses 22-31 about his vindication.

Originally, when Christians' *Pascha* was a unitary festival, the whole psalm could be sung at one go, with a highly dramatic change of key at verse 22. (I had this burnt upon me as a Church of England choirboy by the shift of the Anglican chant from a minor to a major key at this point.) The psalm expresses both the humiliation and the vindication of God's righteous servant.

With the split-up of Passion Week and the Easter season, we now have to split the psalm. But we must remember that the Easter part that is sung today speaks of the vindication of the righteous One pre-

cisely in his suffering. The reference to the “afflicted” in the first stanza will help us to bear this in mind.

Reading II: 1 John 3:18-24

This passage is exceedingly difficult to summarize. C. H. Dodd suggests that the author has thrown together some notes he had never had time to develop.

The same scholar discerns six different points here:

- (1) Only if we love one another are we assured of our standing as Christians.
- (2) If we are uncertain about this standing, we may nevertheless trust that God knows us better than we know ourselves.
- (3) If our conscience is clear, we are free to live a life of prayer and of obedience to God’s commandments.
- (4) God’s expectation of us can be summed up under two headings: faith in Jesus Christ and love for one another.
- (5) The external test of mystical union with God (mutual indwelling) is whether or not we keep the commandments.
- (6) The internal test is the gift of the Spirit.

What impresses one in this passage is the way in which the Johannine author succeeds in holding together things that are often separated from one another in our thinking—faith *and* works, belief *and* obedience, the prayer of union with God *and* the love for one another. It is not a matter of either/or but of both/and.

Gospel: John 15:1-8

One is tempted to suppose that the earliest tradition behind the Johannine allegory of the vine was a genuine parable of Jesus, running something like this: The vinedresser takes away from the vine every branch that bears no fruit and prunes every branch that does bear fruit in order that it may bear more. The branches that are cut off wither. They are then gathered and thrown into the fire.

That would be a parable of judgment. Its Johannine allegorization is similar to that of the parables of the shepherd and the door in chapter 10. The vine is equated with Christ, the vinedresser with the Father, the branches with the disciples, the cutting away of the unfruitful branches with the excommunication of the unworthy.

This cutting away of the unfruitful branch may have been earlier applied to Judas. For the evangelist, however, it means the Gnostic heretics. The pruning of those who remain means the future persecution of the disciples.

The equation of Christ with the vine was doubtless suggested by the language of the Eucharist, such as “I am the bread of life,” while the extension of the allegory to include the disciples as branches is

reminiscent of the Pauline doctrine of the Church as the body of Christ.

We should not argue for John's direct dependence on Paul; perhaps both concepts were Christian adaptations of a common Gnostic theme. Added to this is the typical Johannine motif, already encountered in the second reading, of mutual indwelling.

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