



FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Year A

Acts 6:1-7

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

1 Peter 2:4-9

John 14:1-12

Gathering

(Small stones are laid out on a table to suggest a curving pathway leading to an image of a heavenly mansion. Google images offers a number of suggestive images of "heavenly mansions." Unlit votive candles, one for each member, are laid out along the pathway.)

We reflect this week on our call to join ourselves as living stones to Christ, the living stone, in building up our spiritual house. Last week we reflected on the challenge of tuning ourselves in to the voice of our shepherd in the midst of a world of voices that would distract and draw us away from him. What voices of distraction did you resist this past week in order to hear the voice of the Lord?

Prayer

(Members are invited to be conscious that they are in God's presence. After time of quiet, the leader prays, "Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" (John 14:5). With a selection of instrumental music playing, the candles are lit as members continue in silence. When the music is complete, the prayer continues as follows.)

All: Alleluia.

Leader: Exult, you just, in the LORD;
praise from the upright is fitting.
Give thanks to the LORD on the harp;
with the ten-stringed lyre chant his praises.

All: Alleluia.

Leader: Upright is the word of the LORD,
and all his works are trustworthy.
He loves justice and right;
of the kindness of the LORD the earth is full.

All: Alleluia.

Leader: See, the eyes of the LORD are upon those who fear him,
upon those who hope for his kindness,
to deliver them from death
and preserve them in spite of famine.

All: Alleluia.

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

HEARING THE LORD'S GOSPEL

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites members to name a word or phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.)

When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed. Pausing between them, the leader then poses these two questions: “What draws you to this gospel?” “Where do you resist this gospel?” The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After about a minute, the leader invites members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After a time for silent reflection, the leader invites members to re-arrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing. The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)

Reflection

In this week's scriptures, there's a whole lot of building going on. In the first reading, the early Christian community is coming together to *build* a consensus on how to take care of the widows and orphans while also furthering the work of spreading the good news of Christ. In the second reading, we are invited to join ourselves with *the living stone*, Christ, and allow ourselves as *living stones* to be "*built* into a spiritual house." In the gospel, Jesus assures us that he is going to *prepare places* for us in his Father's *house of many dwelling places*.

In the end it is all about Jesus' union with the Father and our finding our way to participate in that union. Thomas asks the key question, "How can we know the way?" The early Christians found their way by attending to the practical along with the spiritual, by acknowledging the needs of the widows, and to the need for prayer and being about the preaching of the good news.

Jesus tells us in no uncertain terms that he is the way to the Father. We find our way with him by living his truth, his life. We *build* on him as the *living stone* that provides the one secure foundation of our lives.

Three men were working together laying bricks when a passer-by asked the first what he was doing. He responded saying, "Just laying bricks." When the second one was asked he responded, "I'm building a wall." When the third one was asked, he replied, "I'm building a cathedral." Each man was engaged in productive building, but the third man was more engaged in the process by visualizing the outcome. God's people are about more than laying bricks or building a wall. As living stones being *built* into a spiritual house, we are bound up with one another in a great work, God's own great work – the *building* of the everlasting kingdom of God.

Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- ◆ The apostles peacefully resolved a conflict facing the new community. How has a peaceful resolution of conflict emerged in your family, parish or workplace? What was required for the peaceful resolution to come about?
- ◆ How is the Father who dwells in you doing his works in/through you these days?
- ◆ How secure are you in knowing the way to the Father?

- ◆ What are you doing to build up your parish community?

HEARING THE GOSPEL'S LORD

(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The leader then poses these questions: "What do you want to hold on to for yourself from this session?" "How are you/we being called to live in response to God's word?" After a pause, the leader invites the community to a time of conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)

Response in Action Suggestions

- ◆ All laborers are working to build a better life. Be appreciative of those who provide you with day to day service in the week ahead. Acknowledge them with a sincere, "Thank you."
- ◆ Connect with a Habitat for Humanity, AmeriCares or Homefront project in your area to help building up or restoring someone's home.
- ◆ Maybe it's time to make a new way in your life, building up your spiritual life or chart a new direction. Make a retreat at an area retreat house.)
- ◆ Set aside twenty minutes some day this week for reflection and prayer. Re-read this week's gospel. Notice the word or phrase that catches your attention. Dwell quietly for a time with that word or phrase.

Prayer

(After a brief pause, the gospel or a portion of it, either of the other readings as appropriate or the responsorial psalm are proclaimed. The idea is to select a text that lends itself to inviting members to the time of silent prayer that follows. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: "What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?" "What do you say to him in response?" The community pauses for a full five minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental selection may be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two, or a brief expression that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. The community receives this without additional comment. Following this sharing, a member of the community prays the following on behalf of all.)

Member: God whispers
 When darkness falls, and storms set in,
 Be still and know I'm there.

 When sunrise fills your room with light,
 Be still and know I'm there.

 When days seem endless,
 Or time too brief,
 Be still and know I'm there.

 I am the way, the truth
 The life,
 Be still and know I'm there.

Suzanne Battos

(Members join in singing, "Eye Has Not Seen." The song may be available on the Internet, When the song is complete, members exchange a sign of peace.)