



SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Year C

Acts 7:55-60

Psalm 97:1-2, 6-7, 9

Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20

John 17:20-26

Gathering

(And unlit candle, a Bible open to this week's gospel and some fresh flowers rest on a table covered with a bright cloth.)

This week we have the privilege of listening to Jesus at prayer. The intimacy of his relationship with the Father is now our inheritance as well. This is our strength and our gift. Last week we focused on the apostles' focus on the observance of the basics that mark our connection to God. How did you let little things go for the sake of focusing on the big things that connect you to God this past week?

Prayer

(The candle is lit. Sitting in the presence of God, members listen quietly to a selection of reflective instrumental music. When the song is complete, the prayer continues as follows. Members respond to each of the leader's invocations by praying: "We were chosen in Christ before the world began.")

Leader: Our God is a just god who rules with a heart of

compassion...

Christ goes before us pushing aside the obstacles to grace...

May we have a heart pliable to pity and open to new life...

Loving God, we come before you gifted by the many graces we have inherited because we are yours. Jesus, our Brother, has gone before us and showed us the way to you. May we, like him, find that place in your heart from which you pour forth both justice and peace. In his name, we pray.

All: Amen.

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

To eavesdrop on conversations not intended to be heard by others is impolite. When we eavesdrop, we are likely to hear three possible things. We may hear things that surprise us. We may hear things that we already know, and we may hear things that we might not want to know.

This week the author of John's Gospel gives us permission to eavesdrop on Jesus at prayer to the Father. We learn the close union between Jesus

and the Father is what he wants for his disciples as well, and ultimately, for those who would follow them. The desire of this prayer reaches down the centuries to us.

In this passage, we may be surprised to hear that Jesus sees the world and those in it as a gift from the Father. "Father, they are your gift to me." This is a rare opportunity to know just how much Jesus treasured his disciples.

As we listen closely, we also hear that the path laid out for Jesus to follow is the path we are meant to follow as well. This includes suffering and death before resurrection – a message we might not want to hear!

This eavesdropping leads us to a point of decision: What to do with what we have overheard? At this point in Easter season, we are moving to a celebration of the Spirit, the source of unity between the Father and the Son. Because of the stirrings of the Spirit within us we have the resources to live the *Christ life*.

The Spirit of the Risen Christ leads us not just to *contemplation*, but also to *action*. It is the Spirit that moves us to respond to the needs of the poor and disenfranchised. It is the Spirit who prompts us to look at our brothers and sisters in Christ in a new way and listen to them with new ears that the love with which the Father loves Jesus may be in us all.

Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- ◆ What stays with you from having eavesdropped on these words of Jesus speaking to his Father? What do they mean for you as you live your life today?
- ◆ How has the love of Christ been shown to you recently?
- ◆ Where have you discovered the face of the risen Christ this Easter season?

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

- ◆ Help an elderly or infirm neighbor make their environment *come to new life* this spring. Perhaps help plant some flowers.
- ◆ Reach out to a family who is receiving a returning veteran.
- ◆ *Eavesdrop* on the social justice ministry office of your diocese. Volunteer to help with one of their projects.
- ◆ Visit the calm depths of the Irish Jesuits' online prayer www.sacredspace.ie.

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, the hymn "Ubi Caritas" is played. It can be found on Utube. When the song is complete, the prayer continues as follows.)

Leader: God, ever-present to us, and at times ever-distant from us, speak to our hearts. Let us hear again the promise of Jesus that we too may be one with you as was Jesus and his first disciples. Make us seekers of unity. Make us creators of community.

All: May we act as welcoming servants to our community. Give us the compassion we need to listen to others. Fill us with a love that does not discriminate against others,

but sees all as your gift to us here and now! We ask this in the name of Jesus who showed us your heart. Amen.

(Members exchange a sign of peace.)

Special Note: *Before the close of this session, the leader invites members to wear something red to next week's session in anticipation of Pentecost.*

