



A Work In Progress

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

CYCLE C

Acts 15:1-2, 22-29

Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23

John 14:23-29

GATHERING

(Several news photos of current events, each torn into a number of pieces are arranged on a table in the gathering place so that each complete picture can sort of be seen. An unlit candle stands in the midst of the pictures.)

We encounter again Jesus' promise that the Father will send the Spirit into our midst; we witness the early community living by that Spirit in the midst of struggle. Last week we reflected on the gift of God's glory dwelling within us. How did you let God's glory shine in your life this past week? *(Members share briefly.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(The candle is lit. The leader calls the community to a time of silent acknowledgment of God's Spirit stirring in their hearts. After some minutes, the community prays as follows:)

Leader: O, God, let all the nations praise you!

All: O, God, let all the nations praise you!

Leader: May God have pity on us and bless us;
may he let his face shine upon us.
So may your way be known upon earth;
among all nations, your salvation.

All: O God, let all the nations praise you.

Leader: May the nations be glad and exult
because you rule the peoples in equity;
the nations on the earth you guide.

All: O God, let all the nations praise you.

Leader: May the peoples praise you, O God;
may all the peoples praise you!
May God bless us,
and may all the ends of the earth fear him!

All: O God, let all the nations praise you.

Psalm 67: 2-3, 5, 6, 8

(A selection in instrumental music is played.)

Focus Question

Recall a time when you knew you had to close ranks with others whether you liked it or not.

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the gospel reading, the facilitator invites members to mention a word, a phrase or an image from one of the readings that particularly struck them this week. Members then read over the commentary and consider the questions in silence for several minutes before entering into conversation.)

Commentary

We approach the close of the Easter season. Shortly, we will be celebrating the feast of the Ascension. But we go back and forth in time in the readings for this week's liturgy. In the reading from Acts, we find ourselves years into the Christian mission in Antioch when dissension arises over the conditions for gentile inclusion. In the gospel, we find ourselves listening to part of Jesus' farewell discourse back on the night before he died. Then with the text from Revelation, we are imagining with John that final eschatological scene yet to be realized.

What distance there seems to be between Revelation's image of final resolution and Acts portrayal of the living situation in the early church! In Revelation we see the culminating symbol of the holy city Jerusalem, that is, God's people fully gathered, coming down from heaven gleaming with the splendor of God. And in such sharp contrast, in Acts we encounter the portrayal of "no little dissension and debate" that arises in Antioch and extends then back to Jerusalem – not yet fully gleaming with the splendor of God. There are essentials at stake here, of course. And there are religious and cultural sensibilities involved as well.

Dealing with diversity is as much a challenge for us today as it was in the early church. Diversity abounds in our world today, ethnically, culturally, religiously and in so many other ways. It is a source of enrichment, but also a source of tension. It is even a source of conflict that leads to violence. Today's violence seems more insidious than ever before. And resistance to dialogue seems to abound.

As a people of faith, however, we understand ourselves as a work in progress, God's work in progress. Jesus tells his disciples of old and us today: "Whoever loves me will keep my word and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him." *Treasuring* all he means for us in how we live our lives, this is *keeping* his word. What he means for us is found in allowing ourselves to be drawn ever more fully into the intimacy between Father, Son and Spirit that spills out from this farewell discourse.

The promise of his own Spirit to be sent by the Father is the pledge that God's own communion is at work in the church and in the world. We see this dynamic at work in the early community as they struggle to resolve dissension in the body. In the midst of it all, they treasured what Jesus meant for them; they kept his word. They depended not just on their own resources, their own wisdom. They resolve the debate over circumcision in community. They acknowledge the outcome of this dialogue as "the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us".

A work in progress we may be, but there is so much unfinished business. Thank God, that even when we do not keep his word, Jesus keeps his: God's Spirit is at work in our hearts, in our midst, throughout our world. If the early community could keep his word and still accommodate diversity, so can we. In the church and in the world, God knows, we need to learn to acknowledge, accommodate and be enriched by diversity.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ Recall a time when you knew you depended on God because your own resources were insufficient to meet a particular challenge.
- ◆ Reflect on an occasion when coming together with others in openness was the key to resolving a conflict.
- ◆ How firmly do you *keep his word* in your heart, in your life?
- ◆ If you had been a member of the church at Antioch, how comfortable do you think you would have been with the whole decision of the Jerusalem community?
- ◆ How easy or difficult is it for you to accommodate diversity?
- ◆ When recently have you sensed the Spirit *reminding you of all that Jesus has told you*?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

(The leader poses the question, "What does God ask of you/us in light of our sharing of life and faith this week?" After a few minutes of reflection, the leader invites conversation in response to the question.)

- ◆ Embrace diversity. Reach out to someone who is culturally, ethnically or religiously *different* from you. Build a bridge of mutual appreciation between yourselves.
- ◆ If you have not already done so, connect with the lobbying effort of your diocese's or state's Catholic Conference to promote gospel values and the common good in public policy.

- ◆ The first step to resolving conflict is to acknowledge it. Address a difficult relationship by approaching another openly about the strain between you and seek resolution where possible.

CLOSING PRAYER AND SENDING FORTH

(The community dwells in silence for some moments. Some reflective music plays quietly in the background. After a time of quiet, the leader invites prayers of praise, thanksgiving and petition. To each prayer, members respond, "Come to us, Lord. Make your dwelling with us." The session concludes with the prayer of blessing that follows.)

Leader: Through the resurrection of his Son,
God has redeemed us and made us his children.
May he bless us with joy.

All: Amen.

Leader: The Redeemer has given us lasting freedom.
May we inherit his everlasting life.

All: Amen.

Leader: By faith we rose with him in baptism.
May our lives be holy,
so that we will be united with him for ever.

All: Amen.

Adapted from Sixth Sunday of Easter: *Solemn Blessing, The Sacramentary.*