

Sunday 8th April 2018

The Second Sunday of Easter

White



Collect

Almighty Father, you have given your only Son to die for our sins and to rise again for our justification: grant us so to put away the leaven of malice and wickedness that we may always serve you in pureness of living and truth; through the merits of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Acts 4:32-35 English Standard Version (ESV)

They Had Everything in Common

4³² Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.³³ And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

COMMENT: Readings from The Acts of the Apostles take precedence over all other Readings besides the Gospel during the seven-week Easter Season. Written perhaps as long as fifty years after the resurrection, much of Acts contains the recollection of events rather than contemporary, eye-witness reports. The central message of Acts is the *kerygma* (proclaimed message or teaching), of the Apostolic Church and its spread from Jerusalem to Rome under the leadership of both Peter and Paul. Prominent in the presentation of the apostolic *kerygma* are the several versions of the “sermon” preached by one or other of the apostles and Stephen. Some competition between the two apostles, Peter and Paul, may be discovered between the lines of Acts. They may have had their differences and their supporting enthusiasts, but the true hero of the story is the Holy Spirit. Peter and Paul are always successful in their various missions because they are under the protection and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The church is preparing to live in the world under the authority and guidance of the Holy Spirit. This may lead to martyrdom like that of Stephen (Acts 7) and James (Acts 12), but the blood of the martyrs only

increased the fervour of their fellow Christians as they marched inexorably from Jerusalem to Rome declaring that Jesus is Lord, and is above all earthly rulers. In this brief passage we catch a glimpse of the life of the early Christian community. Motivated by the Holy Spirit, they generously shared what property they possessed, in a generosity that would shame us all.

John 20:19-31 English Standard Version (ESV)

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

20¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews,^[a] Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

Jesus and Thomas

²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin,^[b] was not with them when Jesus came.²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

The Purpose of This Book

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Footnotes: a. Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time. b. Greek *Didymus*.

COMMENT: John comments on the Resurrection appearances – this is now the evening of Resurrection Sunday. The author of John is more than aware of the Lucan Pentecost tradition but links the giving of the Spirit to the

Resurrection. He also deals with the issue of doubt. In the opening of the story there is a confession of faith, which can easily be missed. “We have seen *the Lord*” John uses this title throughout the Gospel sparingly. It was very much a post-Resurrection title. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead had proved his life and ministry – here indeed, in him is found the fullness of God made flesh – Jesus, the Lord. Upon Thomas’ confession Jesus provides a beatitude; “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”.

Psalm 133 *Ecce quam bonum!* Grail Psalter

R Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

¹ How good and how pleasant it is,
when brothers live in unity! **R**

² It is like precious oil upon the head
running down upon the beard,
running down upon Aaron’s beard,
upon the collar of his robes. **R**

³ It is like the dew of Hermon which falls
on the heights of Zion.
For there the Lord gives his blessing,
life for ever. **R**

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.**

COMMENT: This brief psalm, one of a collection fifteen known as Songs of Ascents (Psalms 120-134), believed to have been sung by pilgrims approaching the temple to celebrate the blessings of belonging to the Jewish community. Accidentally or intentionally during Holy Week, Christians often forget that the first Christians were Jews who felt deeply about the temple as the central sanctuary and gathering place for Jews from all over the Roman world. At the time of Christ, there may have been more Jews in the Diaspora than in Palestine. Naturally, they spoke many languages. From the 2nd Century BC, they had their scriptures in both Greek and Hebrew. This reality gives additional meaning to the words of the opening verse of this psalm. The unity of ‘brothers’ is inclusive – read; ‘brothers and sisters’. The similes that follow in verses 2-3 depict two very different images. Some scholars tend to regard the text as corrupt, but nevertheless, it makes sense when fully explained. The first of these similes may not say much to modern readers. It refers to the sacred oil used in the anointing of the high priest. Aaron, brother of Moses, was regarded as founder of the hereditary priesthood. In this illustration, the oil of anointing dribbled down from his head to

his beard and onto the rich collar of his robe. Exodus 30:22-30 contains a description of how this oil was made and reserved for this special purpose. In the temple worship, the high priest played a particularly significant role that would have been obvious to every worshipper. Could John have had this image in mind when he told the story of Mary of Bethany anointing Jesus' feet? As for the second simile, dew is one of the more important meteorological phenomena of Palestine. In the dry climate of the mountainous region between the coastal plain and the Jordan River, dew provides moisture crucial to the production of food. Jerusalem stands on five hills, or low mountains, one of which is Mount Zion. Snow-capped much of the year, Mount Hermon lies far to the north. Its cooling breezes and plentiful water supply moderates the climate of Galilee, but do not reach as far south as Jerusalem. A town in the foothills of Mount Hermon is called Ijon (1 Kings 15:20; 2 Kings 15:29; 2 Chronicles 16:4), which caused some scholars to state that the reference to Zion is a gloss in the text. This may not be so, since the dews of Hermon and of Zion could both parallel the perfumed oil lavishly poured on the head of the high priest. For Christians, the significance of the psalm lies in the closing words: the blessing of faith is eternal life. Thus the Easter message comes through vividly in yet another reinterpretation of the well-loved scriptures of the Hebrew tradition.

Short Preface

But chiefly are we bound to praise you because you raised him gloriously from the dead. For he is the true paschal lamb who was offered for us, and has taken away the sin of the world. By his death he has destroyed death, and by his rising to life again he has restored to us everlasting life.

Post Communion

Lord God our Father, through our Saviour Jesus Christ you have assured your children of eternal life and in baptism have made us one with him: deliver us from the death of sin and raise us to new life in your love, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen**

Blessing

The God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the eternal covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always. **Amen.**