

Notes for Next Sunday

Fifth Sunday of Easter

The Point of this Week's Readings

First Reading (Acts 6:1-9, 7:2a, 51-60). The heart of this reading is about Stephen. It begins with a problem. The early church was growing so fast that the 12 disciples were being stretched beyond their means in their ability to serve the needs of this expanding membership. At issue here was the neglect of some Grecian widows. The disciples wisely appoint some deacons of Greek descent to help them in serving the congregation. The primary task of these deacons was to serve the widows. Stephen goes beyond that scope and winds up preaching and teaching. This brings him into conflict with the Jewish leaders who opposed Jesus and the disciples. They become so incensed with him that they wind up stoning him to death. Near the end of the reading Saul (later Paul) appears as one who is in harmony with the Jewish leaders and guards their cloaks. This was tantamount to giving assent to what happened.

Epistle (1 Peter 2:2-10). Peter urges his readers to crave the Word of God with as much determination as newborn babies desire the milk that will help them to grow strong. This he reminds them will lead them to be witnesses to the light of the gospel that has saved them. Peter reminds them that once they were “no people” but now they are people of God to whom great mercy is shown by the Lord. The verses in the middle of this reading tell of how many Jews have not believed in Christ and stumbled in their walk of their spiritual journey.

Gospel (John 14:1-14). Jesus is nearing the time when He must suffer and die. He has thrown out signals to the disciples before but now as the time draws night He once more shares words of comfort with them. In the first three verses Jesus gives some very comforting and concrete information of His future as well as theirs when their life comes to close. Thomas states that he does not know the way and Jesus quickly assures Thomas that He, Jesus, is the one only way. When Philip chimes in concerning questions about the Father, Jesus declares that He and the Father are one. Furthermore, Jesus promises that when He goes to the Father they can ask anything in Jesus name.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

FIRST READING – Acts 6:1-9; 7:2a, 51-60

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. ²So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” ⁵This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. ⁶They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. ⁷So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

6:1 daily distribution of food. Greek diakonia, “service,” “ministry.” The social service described in 4:34-35 remained a striking feature of the Jerusalem Church and was attractive to outsiders. It benefited especially widows, who were often subject to dire hardship. (TLSB)

6:2 *serve tables*. This expression could well be rendered “to see to meals.” They were not claiming that the work of seeing to meals for widows was beneath them. It would be a mistake to think that the apostles thought that waiting on tables was “unspiritual” work. The ministry of the Word of God and waiting on tables are both spiritual when they are done by spiritual persons. That is true of every God - pleasing occupation. Service done for Jesus’ sake, done as to the Lord is spiritual service. But the particular service to which the Lord had called the Twelve was to proclaim the word. (PBC)

6:3 *choose seven men*. † The church elected them (v. 5), and the apostles commissioned them (v. 6). In this way they were appointed to their work.

6:3 *full of the Spirit*. Both spiritual and practical aptitudes. (TLSB)

6:8 *full of God’s grace and power*. This means that Stephen enjoyed special gifts in addition to the wisdom and faith which were noted at the time of his election as “deacon.” He was able to employ those gifts in doing great wonders and miraculous signs. (PBC)

6:9 *Freedmen*. Luke describes Stephen’s attackers as those who, like Stephen, were born and grew up in one of the countries listed in Acts 2 and had come back to Jerusalem to live. (CSB)

²To this he replied: “Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran.

⁵¹“You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! ⁵²Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— ⁵³you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.” ⁵⁴When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. ⁵⁵But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶“Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” ⁵⁷At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

7:51 *uncircumcised hearts and ears*. Though physically circumcised, they were acting like the uncircumcised pagan nations around them. They were not truly consecrated to the Lord. (CSB)

7:54 *gnashed their teeth*. The “grinding the teeth” was a sign of hostility and rage, especially of the wicked against the righteous. (CSB)

7:56 *Son of Man*. Jesus used this title of himself (see Mk 2:10) to emphasize his relationship to Messianic prediction. It is unusual for someone other than Jesus to apply this term to Christ. (CSB)

7:57 *covered their ears*. The physical gesture is wonderfully expressive of Stephen’s charge that they are “uncircumcised in ears.” They do everything to keep from hearing the prophet’s proclamation that Jesus is the one raised to the presence of God. (Sacra)

7:58 *dragged him outside the city*. The person to be stoned should be taken outside the court (city). (Sacra)

7:58 *began to stone him*. It was illegal to carry out the death penalty without permission of the Roman governor, but did not seem to matter when a mob action resulted in murder. (PBC)

7:59 *laid their clothes at the feet of ... Saul*. † Luke's way of introducing the main character of the second section of the book. (CSB) According to Jewish law, the witnesses had to throw the first stones. They had to take off their outer cloak to do it. (PBC)

7:60 *do not hold this sin against them*. Compare with Jesus' words (Lk 23:34). (CSB)

EPISTLE – 1 Peter 2:2-10

² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. ⁴ As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— ⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” ⁷ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,” ⁸ and, “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. ⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

2:2 *crave*. The unrestrained hunger of a healthy baby provides an example of the kind of eager desire for spiritual food (the Word) that ought to mark the believer. (CSB)

2:3 *have tasted*. Infants are satisfied by their mother's milk. Christians likewise find that God's Word satisfies their deepest needs. (TLSB)

2:4 *living Stone*. The people of God are the temple in which He dwells; Christ is the cornerstone. (TLSB)

2:7 *rejected by men but chosen by God*. God often does his most wonderful works by instruments which the world rejects. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

2:9 *chosen people*. As the Israelites were once the chosen people of God, now Christians are the new Israel, chosen by God. (TLSB)

2:9 *holy priesthood*. The whole body of believers. As priests, believers are to (1) reflect the holiness of God and that of their high priest, (2) offer spiritual sacrifices (here), (3) intercede for man before God and (4) represent God before man. (CSB)

GOSPEL – John 14:1-14

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going.” ⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” ⁶ Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really knew me, you would now ^a my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.” ⁸ Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” ⁹ Jesus answered:

“Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. ¹² I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

14:2 rooms. Lit, “dwelling places.” Imagery depicts not temporary housing, such as a hotel room, but permanent residence with the Father in heaven. (TLSB)

14:3 I will come back. Jesus comes in many ways, but the primary reference here is to his second advent. (CSB)

14:10 not just my own. Jesus’ teaching was not of human origin, and there was an inseparable connection between his words and his work. – Jesus and the Father do not work apart from each other. (CSB)

14:14 in my name. Not simply a formula appended to a prayer, but prayer in keeping with Jesus’ revealed will and teaching. (TLSB)