

Notes for Next Sunday

Sixth Sunday of Easter

The Point of this Week's Readings

First Reading (Acts 17:16-31). Paul, Silas and Timothy had been out on Paul's second missionary journey sharing the gospel. They had been met with much opposition and been driven out of a number of cities. Our reading finds Paul in Athens waiting for Silas and Timothy to rejoin him. He did not sit around doing nothing. He notices that Athens is filled with false idols. As he often does, he goes to the synagogue and teaching the gospel message with fellow believers. He also does so in the market place and encounters some philosophers who spent their daily life sitting around talking logic. They challenge his teaching and invite Paul to join them in debate. Paul's wandering Athens had led him to find numerous idols and even one entitled "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." In this they had tried to cover all of their bases. Paul uses that altar to introduce them to the true God and what Christ had done for the whole world.

Epistle (1 Peter 3:13-22). We need to remember that the people Peter was writing to were being constantly harassed. It also seems that the harmful treatment they were receiving was very unfair and of immoral character. Peter urges his hearers to take the high road. He tells them that when their enemies sink ever lower they are to employ even high principles of Christian living. They are to respond to harshness with gentleness. In doing so they are reflecting the life of Christ who absorbed illegal and immoral treatment in His ministry, suffering and death. This would allow them to witness to the hope they had within them. Peter also references Noah's rescue in the flood and likens it to power of baptism. Baptism gives another tool to bravely live their life in a Christ-like manner.

Gospel (John 14:15-21). In this reading Jesus is talking to His disciples and He is emphasizing the importance of love. Jesus is speaking of Agape love. This is self-sacrificing love. It is the highest kind of love. It gives and gives without ever expecting any return. This is the love Jesus displayed throughout His life on earth. Agape love is not one that any human can will himself to do out by their own ability. It is the fruit of faith which can only come from God. Jesus also comforts His disciples by promising them the Holy Spirit who has worked faith in their hearts and will continue to grow their faith and thus lead them to obey Christ's command to love. The reading ends with Jesus promising the great reward His disciples will have when in heaven they will be loved by Him and His Father.

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

FIRST READING – Acts 17:16-31

¹⁶ While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbling trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?" ²⁰ You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean." ²¹ (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) ²² Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. ²⁴ "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and

earth and does not live in temples built by hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. ²⁶ From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷ God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸ ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ ²⁹ “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man’s design and skill. ³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”

17:18 Epicurean ... philosophers. The philosophical fame of Athens is evident. Epicureanism emphasized seeking a pleasurable life, though not merely in a sensual way. Stoicism stressed the rational order of nature and urged people to accept their fate within it. These two Gk philosophies were the most popular of the day. (TLSB)

17:20 Their openness is reminiscent of the Bereans (vv 11–12), as well as those at Pisidian Antioch (13:42). (TLSB)

17:24 does not live in temples. Pagans generally built temples for their gods to “live” in, as evidenced by the statues contained therein. The God of creation transcends earth and any structure on it. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – 1 PETER 3:13-22

¹³ Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear what they fear do not be frightened.” ¹⁵ But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷ It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. ¹⁸ For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, ¹⁹ through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison ²⁰ who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, ²¹ and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

3:14 even if you should suffer. Whatever trials or sufferings Christians face, they know that Christ grants strength, forgiveness, and life everlasting. (TLSB)

3:15 be prepared to give an answer. Greek *apologia*. Positive testimony and witness to the truth of the Gospel. Christianity stands up to scrutiny and investigation because it is true. Christians are to be prepared to tell others about this truth whenever they have the opportunity. (TLSB)

3:18 once for all. Our sufferings do not atone for our sin; Christ made atonement for us by His cross. His resurrection gives absolute certainty that His sacrifice was effective. (TLSB)

3:21 water symbolizes baptism. The flood is a figure of Baptism. In each case, water saves. The world was cleansed when Noah and his family were lifted up by the flood. Baptism cleanses and raises us to

new life. By grace, Baptism is a means of salvation through which the Holy Spirit produces faith (cf Eph 5:25–27).

GOSPEL – John 14:15-21

¹⁵ “If you love me, you will obey what I command. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

14:16 Counselor. Or “Helper.” It is a legal term, but with a broader meaning than “counsel for the defense.” It referred to any person who helped someone in trouble with the law. The Spirit will always stand by Christ’s people. (CSB)

14:17 the Spirit of truth. The Holy Spirit imparts the truth found in God and His Son, who speaks truthful words. (TLSB)

14:18 I will not leave you as orphans. An orphan is the most helpless of all people, even more so than a widow. – The disciples on Maundy Thursday were experiencing a sinking feeling in the pit of their stomachs, for everything that had believed in, hoped for, and counted on seemed to be slipping away. Many times people experience that same sense of anguish, of things falling apart. A seemingly good marriage crumbles. A promising young life is snuffed out in an auto accident. A woman is suddenly widowed. Nothing holds together. One’s world and everything one held onto is collapsing. It’s like being lost in the supermarket and no one comes to claim us. It’s like being orphaned. (LifeLight)

14:18 I will come to you. After His resurrection they would see Him again. (TLSB)

14:19 Because I live, you also will live. The life of the Christian always depends on the life of Christ. (CSB)

14:20 I am in my Father. Christ dwells in His people so that they have intimate communion with Him and His Father. (TLSB)

14:21 obeys ... loves. Love for Christ and keeping his commands cannot be separated. (CSB)

14:21 loved by my Father ... I too will love him. The disciples’ love for Jesus will meet with a blessed response. The one who loves Jesus guards and treasures everything that is Jesus’. Now the third-person singular is employed. WE love because He first loved us. The risen Lord will be a spiritual presence to those who believe. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)