

OPENING COLLECT

O God the king of glory, you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven: we beseech you, leave us not comfortless, but send your Holy Spirit to strengthen us and exalt us to the place where our Saviour Christ is gone before, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING: Acts 1.6-14

⁶ When the apostles had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' ⁷ He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' ⁹ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹ They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven?

This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.' ¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. ¹³ When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴ All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

Or Ezekiel 36.24-28

The word of the LORD came to me:

²⁴ I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land.

²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. ²⁸ Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

It is important to recall that we call this Sunday the 'Sunday after Ascension', because the Church needs to feel the full force of the ascension of Christ, which we celebrated on Thursday. Jesus has gone and his work must go on! So, as Mary found in the garden (John 20), there must be no clinging to the risen Christ. Similarly, there can be no lingering, for the disciples, on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9.35), and, now, those same disciples cannot afford to stand staring up into heaven, in adoration- there is work to do! In previous Gospels, Easter 5 and 6, we have seen how Jesus, according to John, promises that the young Church will not be 'orphaned' but that the Spirit will guide them into all truth, so that they will do even greater works.

In the Scriptures, as in our alternative reading (Ezekiel 36.24-8), God promises to put a new heart and a new spirit, into his people, and this is exactly what is to happen now. So, it should not surprise us that, in today's passage from Acts, the disciples, challenged by the 'men in white robes', return to Jerusalem to devote themselves to prayer, and wait. Perhaps this is not a bad way to start their work for God! They put themselves at his disposal, in prayer and, of course, as Acts goes on to tell us, they do, indeed, become filled with the Spirit. The proclamation and the living of the Gospel, with confidence and courage, begins. The challenge for us is obvious!

SECOND READING: 1 Peter 4.12-14; 5.6-11

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice in so far as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. 6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. 7 Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. 8 Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.

10 And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. 11 To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

More from 1 Peter, in fact this is the last passage we shall use for a bit. It acts as a bit of a summary, perhaps on the principle that in a good sermon, you should 'say what you are going to say, say it, and then tell them what you have said'! So Peter, or the writer, ends by giving his readers an admonition to keep the faith and resist the devil. They must put all their trust in God, whatever the circumstances, and he will "restore, support, strengthen and establish (them)", as he surely will us all, if we, similarly, turn to him in trust, and are steadfast in faith.

Gospel: John 17.1-11

1 Jesus looked up to heaven and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, 2 since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. 5 So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. 6 I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8 for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. 9 I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11 And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.'

The sermon/prayer of John 14-17 comes to a climax in today's Gospel. Jesus, having prepared his disciples for his departure, prayerfully prepares himself for his moment of glory. Remember that there is no Gethsemane prayer in John, for this Gospel writer depicts Jesus as knowing exactly where he is going and what he is doing. His every act has been done to the glory of God (verse 4), and now he looks to his own moment of glory, his death on the cross. Of his disciples he says that they now know all that they need to know in order to carry on the work: he has trained them well. Although our passage from 1 Peter is not directly linked to the Gospel passage or to that from Acts, yet, the other side of the Ascension, it fits in very well. The young Church in Acts, the readers of Peter's Epistle, as well as we today, have a task to fulfil. If we keep our trust in God and walk the way of Jesus Christ, we shall know the power of the Spirit in our lives and further glorify God, and Jesus, by our deeds. How appropriate the collect below is: it makes sense of Pentecost, to which we turn next week.

Post-Communion Collect

Eternal God, giver of love and power, your Son Jesus Christ has sent us into all the world to preach the gospel of his kingdom: confirm us in this mission, and help us to live the good news we proclaim; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**