

7th Sunday of Easter, Cycle A

Acts 1:12-14

Three things happen in this reading: The apostles return to Jerusalem after witnessing the Ascension, they come together with some of the other close followers as a community, and they all watch together in prayer for the coming of the Spirit.⁴

12After Jesus had been taken up to heaven the apostles This refers to the eleven.³ returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. This is a reminder that the apostles were still faithful Jews who observed the law.¹⁰

13When they entered the city they went to the upper room This is the same spacious room where Jesus celebrated the Last Supper.² where they were staying, Peter This is the Pastor of the universal Church.⁷ He is always first in the lists of the Apostles. He and his brother, Andrew, were fishing partners with James and John, the sons of Zebedee. He was crucified in Rome in 67 A.D. and at his request, was hung upside down on the cross.⁹ A very ancient tradition, supported by archaeological excavations, say that his tomb is under the altar of St. Peter's Basilica.¹¹ and John This is the disciple whom Jesus loved. He is a son of Zebedee and he stood at the foot of the cross with Mary, the mother of Jesus. He died in Ephesus at an extraordinarily advanced age. He wrote the Gospel and the Letters that go under his name as well as the book of Revelation.⁷ and James This is James, the brother of John, who was with Jesus at the Transfiguration and agony in the garden and was killed by the sword. He is often known as "James the Great".⁷ The Spanish have a long tradition that James introduced the Christian faith to Spain.⁹ and Andrew, Andrew is the brother of Peter and was the first of the Apostles to be called to follow Jesus. Tradition has it that he was the Apostle to the Greeks in the years after Pentecost and that he was crucified in the city of Patras in Greece. Like his brother, he asked to be nailed to a cross in a different way from the Cross of Jesus. In his case it was an X-shaped cross.⁷ Philip He is said to have evangelized first Greece and then Frisia, where he is supposed to have died, in Hierapolis, by a torture described variously as crucifixion or stoning.⁷ and Thomas, This is the man who doubted the resurrection until he put his fingers into the nail holes in the hands of Jesus and his hand into the wound in the side of the Savior. (John 20:25) Having first evangelized Syria and Persia, Thomas went on to India.⁷ It is believed that he died there of stab wounds in 72 A.D.⁹ Bartholomew This man who was a close friend of Philip is traditionally identified as Nathanael. He preached for a time in what is now Turkey and then in Armenia and then probably in India. He wore the same shoes and clothing for twenty-six years without a change and he prayed one hundred times a day and one hundred times a night. In the end he was beaten with clubs, skinned alive and finally beheaded.⁹ and Matthew, This tax collector was the writer of the first Gospel.⁷ He was a man of austere personal habits, a vegetarian who lived on nuts, seeds, and vegetables. He ministered to the Jewish Christian community in Palestine for fifteen years.⁹ After that he apparently spread the Good News in Ethiopia.⁸ He may have been stabbed in the back or burned to death or he may have lived into old age.⁹ James son of Alphaeus, Tradition calls this man "James the Less." He played a prominent role in the Church of Jerusalem. The Letter that bears the name of James is also attributed to him and is included in the New Testament canon. He is said to have been stoned to death in the year 62.⁷ Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. Simon is supposed to have traveled in Egypt, Africa and Britain before he joined forces with Judas, the son of James—maybe James the Great.⁹

Judas, who is sometimes called Thaddaeus, was the writer of the epistle of Jude in the Bible.⁷ He is known as the Saint of Lost Causes. The Church in Armenia has always held that it was founded by Jude. These were the only two apostles to die together. They had made some 60,000 converts to Christianity in and around the city of Babylon and then moved on to Suanir where they were first stoned and then Jude was killed with a spear and Simon was sawn into pieces.⁹

This list has the apostles in the order of their importance.⁶ Jesus called these men without exception, from the most varied social and religious backgrounds. The group of the Twelve is the prefiguration of the Church where there must be room for all charisms, peoples and races.⁷

14All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, Most people in our culture are strongly oriented toward action, toward getting the job done. When it comes to the work of God, however, we often have to wait and to pray. Otherwise the work we do may not be guided by the Holy Spirit and may not be serving God's will.⁵ **together with some women,** These are the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee and who witnessed his death, his burial, and his resurrection. They are now to share the gift of the Spirit.¹⁰ These were disciples of Jesus whose generosity helped to subsidize his public ministry.² Pope John Paul II wrote in his Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*: "The Church gives thanks for each and every woman...The Church gives thanks for all the manifestations of the feminine 'genius' which have appeared in the course of history, in the midst of all peoples and nations; she gives thanks for all the charisms which the Holy Spirit distributes to women in the history of the People of God, for all the victories which she owes to their faith, hope and charity: she gives thanks for all the fruits of feminine holiness."⁷ **and Mary the mother of Jesus,** Luke saw Mary as a cardinal figure in the birth of Jesus where she was overshadowed by the Spirit, and in the birth of the Church at Pentecost where the Spirit came upon her in a new way. She became the spiritual mother of the church at the foot of the cross when Jesus gave her to John and gave John to her. Vatican II ratified her prominent place by officially proclaiming Mary as the "Mother of the Church" at the close of the third session in 1964.¹ **and his brothers.** These were most likely cousins of Jesus who were once skeptical of his mission but now are portrayed as disciples.² The explanation for this lies in the peculiarities of Semitic languages for the word translated as "brothers" can also be applied to all the members of family groups and was even used for distant cousins and nephews.¹ Some have also theorized that these were children of Joseph from a former marriage. At one point Jesus described those who heard and kept his word as his "brethren" which was a designation for certain disciples who were particularly loyal to our Lord. However, the Church has always taught that the Virgin Mary had no children other than Jesus, whom she conceived by the action of the Holy Spirit and without intervention of man, so this expression cannot mean that Jesus had blood brothers or sisters.¹

1 Peter 4:13-16

It was Peter's view that persecution is inevitable for it is human nature to dislike, to resent, and to regard with suspicion anyone who is different; the Christian is necessarily different from the man of the world. To the world the Christian brings the standards of Jesus Christ and he is inevitably a kind of conscience to any group or society in which he moves. The very goodness of Christianity can be an offense to a world in which goodness is a handicap.¹⁵

The last Beatitude reads: "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven." (Mt. 5:10-12)

Beloved:

13Rejoice to the extent that you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice exultantly. Persecution is the way to glory. The Cross is the way to the crown. Jesus Christ is no man's debtor, and his joy and crown await the man who, through thick and thin, has been true to him.¹⁵

14If you are insulted for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. St. Peter's phrasing is very close to the last Beatitude from Matthew, which is considered to be the greatest Beatitude. The common teaching is that when we suffer for Christ we are most conformed to him in his total gift of himself to the Father for our salvation...Every philosophy and religion has wrestled with human suffering but only Christianity considers it blessed.¹¹ St. John of Avila wrote: "God wants to open our eyes and have us realize what favors are being done us in things the world regards as disadvantages, and how honored we are to be scoffed at for seeking the honor of God, and what great reward awaits us for our present depression, and how God's gentle, sweet and loving arms are opened wide to receive those wounded in doing battle on his behalf."¹³

15But let no one among you be made to suffer as a murderer, a thief, and evildoer, or as an intriguer. "intriguer" is a very rare Greek term indicating a person who meddles in another's business; a malefactor.¹¹ Faith, baptism, and conversion do not mean that Christians are somehow immune to flesh, suffering, and sin. Suffering is unfortunately a fact of life. However, Christian suffering must be in innocence, not as a just punishment for an immoral life.¹⁴

16But whoever is made to suffer as a Christian This is one of only three times that the word "Christian" is used in the New Testament.³ **should not be ashamed but glorify God because of the name.** While this name could refer to "Christ," it is more likely "Christian." When someone suffers as a "Christian," it is not a source of shame as when someone is condemned as a "murderer," "thief," "evildoer," or "intriguer. On the contrary, bearing the name of "Christian" is a means by which the righteous sufferer glorifies God.³ The connection between suffering and the presence of the Holy Spirit becomes clear for us when we recall that the Spirit is called the Paraclete (Comforter). It is acceptance of that Spirit and of the *insight* the Spirit brings that enables us to look on suffering as a *participation* in the paschal mystery (the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus).⁴

John 17:1-11a

Our reading takes place at the Last Supper.¹¹ This begins the high priestly prayer of Jesus. It has three parts: Jesus offers up his approaching sacrifice to the Father (1-5), pleads for the preservation of his disciples (6-19), and prays for the unity of the universal Church (20-26). This is the longest extended prayer recorded in the Gospels.¹⁶ It fulfills the great petitions of the Our Father.¹⁷ (CCC2758) As our High Priest, Jesus prays for us and he is the one who prays in us and he is the God who hears our prayer.¹⁷ (CCC2749)

1Jesus raised his eyes to heaven This is a traditional prayer gesture.¹⁶ **and said, "Father, the hour has come.** The "hour" of Jesus is that of his glorification: the crucifixion, death, and resurrection by which salvation is achieved.¹¹ **Give glory to your son, so that your son may glorify you,** Jesus has completed the work of "glorifying" the Father in giving eternal life through the Eucharist which has now been given to the apostles.¹¹

2just as you gave him authority over all people, so that your son may give eternal life to all you gave him. The Father has given the Son power to give life and to judge.¹¹

³Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ. Personal knowledge of God is a sign of the New Covenant according to Jer 31:34: “And no longer will they have need to teach their friends and kinsmen how to know the Lord. All, from least to greatest, shall know me, says the Lord.”

⁴I glorified you on earth by accomplishing the work that you gave me to do. The Son has glorified the Father by revealing Him perfectly in all the words and deeds of His life.¹¹

⁵Now glorify me, Father, with you, with the glory that I had with you before the world began. Now in turn the Father will glorify Jesus in the Resurrection and Ascension by which Jesus will return to the glory that was his before he took on a human body.¹¹

⁶I revealed your name To the Jews, the “name” is equivalent to the person.¹¹ Like Moses to whom God revealed the name “Yahweh,” Jesus has revealed that “Yahweh saves,” which is the meaning of Jesus’ name in Hebrew. “Jesus” is the name at which “every knee must bend,” as St. Paul says. It is precisely as God that Jesus saves us and that is revealed in his very name.¹² to those whom you gave me out of the world. These are the apostles.¹¹ They have been taken not from the world that God made, the world that is good in itself, but from the world of the flesh, of sin.¹² They belonged to you, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Though often lacking in understanding, the disciples have been faithful to the teaching given them.¹⁹

⁷Now they know that everything you gave me is from you, The apostles have been shown the Father, and Jesus is now beginning his prayer for them.¹¹

⁸because the words you gave to me I have given to them, and they accepted them and truly understood that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me. This is in a way a last will and testament wherein Jesus makes clear that he now entrusts to his disciples what the Father had entrusted to him, namely the good news of salvation.⁴

⁹I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for the ones you have given me, because they are yours, It isn’t that Jesus is excluding from his prayers the world that God loves; the subject of this prayer is the Apostles, the first Bishops of the Church, who must live in the world but be no part of it.¹¹

¹⁰and everything of mine is yours and everything of yours is mine, and I have been glorified in them. The prayer now encompasses the disciples who belong to the Father and the Son as a common possession.¹⁹

^{11a}And now I will no longer be in the world, but they are in the world, while I am coming to you.” This is the reason for this prayer: The Apostles need the divine protection in a special way, now that the visible presence of Jesus is about to be removed from them.¹⁹ Notice how Jesus, the “new Moses” prays for the Apostles before going up the hill of Golgotha to die, just as Moses of old prayed for the Twelve tribes of Israel before going up Mount Nebo to die.¹⁸

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “The Navarre Bible: Acts Of The Apostles,” (2) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles” with Commentary and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (3) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2008” by James L. Weaver, (4) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2002” by Aelred R. Rosser, (5) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1999” by Lawrence E. Mick, (6) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: The Acts Of The Apostles” by William S. Kurz, S.J., (7) “The Apostles” by Pope Benedict XVI, (8) “The Founding of Christendom” by Warren H. Carroll, (9) “The Twelve: The Lives of the Apostles After Calvary” by C. Bernard Ruffin, (10) “The Acts of the Apostles” by Luke Timothy Johnson, (11) The St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology Online, founded by Dr. Scott Hahn, (12) Commentary Notes of Tim Gray and Sean Innerst, (13) “The Navarre Bible: Catholic Epistles,” (14) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: 1 Peter” by Jerome H. Neyrey, S.J., (15) “The Letters Of James And Peter” by William Barclay, (16) “Ignatius Catholic Study

Bible: The Gospel of John” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (17) “Catechism Of The Catholic Church, (18) “The Catholic Bible Study: John” by Stephen K. Ray, and (19) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary.”

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.