

# Sunday, May 17, 2020

## Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year A

### Introduction\*

Jesus does not abandon his followers. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus comes to abide with his disciples of every generation. As Pentecost draws near, we are reminded that the risen Christ dwells in us as the Spirit of truth. We receive this Spirit in baptism and pray that in our gathering around the Lord's table the Spirit will transform us to be the body of the risen Christ in the world.

### Prayer of the Day

Almighty and ever-living God, you hold together all things in heaven and on earth. In your great mercy receive the prayers of all your children, and give to all the world the Spirit of your truth and peace, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**



## **First Reading: Acts 17:22-31**

*In Athens, Paul faces the challenge of proclaiming the gospel to Greeks who know nothing of either Jewish or Christian tradition. He proclaims that the "unknown god" whom they worship is the true Lord of heaven and earth who will judge the world with justice through Jesus, whom God has raised from the dead.*

22Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. 23For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. 24The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, 25nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. 26From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, 27so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. 28For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said,

'For we too are his offspring.'

29Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and

imagination of mortals. <sup>30</sup>While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, <sup>31</sup>because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

*By chapter 10 of Acts, Luke has moved the Christian proclamation from Peter’s role in Jewish Jerusalem to Paul’s role in the wider Gentile world. In Athens today a commemorative plaque marks the traditional site of this speech of Paul. This Areopagus was nearby the Parthenon, the city’s primary temple to Athena, and to the temples of other Greco-Roman deities. Paul’s speech is framed to convince polytheists, Stoics, Epicureans, and admirers of classical poetry about the truth of Christ’s resurrection.*

## Psalm: Psalm 66:8-20

*Bless our God, you peoples; let the sound of praise be heard. (Ps. 66:8)*

8 Bless our | God, you peoples;  
let the sound of | praise be heard.

9 **Our God has kept us a- | mong the living  
and has not allowed our | feet to slip. R**

10 For you, O God, have | tested us;  
you have tried us just as sil- | ver is tried.

11 **You brought us in- | to the net;  
you laid heavy burdens up- | on our backs.**

12 You let people ride over our heads; we went through | fire and  
water,

but you brought us out into a place | of refreshment.

13 **I will enter your house | with burnt offerings  
and will pay | you my vows—**

14 those that I promised | with my lips  
and spoke with my mouth when I | was in trouble.

15 **I will offer you burnt offerings of fatlings with the |  
smoke of rams;**

**I will give you ox- | en and goats. R**

16 Come and listen, all you | who believe,  
and I will tell you what God has | done for me.

17 **I called out to God | with my mouth,  
and praised the Lord | with my tongue.**

18 If I had cherished evil | in my heart,  
the Lord would | not have heard me;

19 **but in truth | God has heard me  
and has attended to the sound | of my prayer.**

20 Blessed be God, who has not reject- | ed my prayer,  
nor withheld unfailing | love from me. **R**

## **Second Reading: 1 Peter 3:13-22**

*The author of 1 Peter encourages Christians to remain faithful even in the face of defamation and persecution. In baptism we are made clean to act in accordance with what is right.*

<sup>13</sup>Who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? <sup>14</sup>But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, <sup>15</sup>but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; <sup>16</sup>yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. <sup>17</sup>For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. <sup>18</sup>For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, <sup>19</sup>in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, <sup>20</sup>who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. <sup>21</sup>And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup>who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

*After a section describing first-century Greco-Roman household codes of behavior, the author of 1 Peter spoke of the probability of persecutions. The author's enigmatic comment about "the spirits in prison" assisted the medieval church in constructing its theories of purgatory and hell. The author's likening baptism to Noah's flood exemplifies the New Testament adoption of Old Testament narratives as Christian metaphor. The author clarifies that the flood is not literally a washing away, but rather a metaphor for the power of Christ's resurrection.*

## **Gospel: John 14:15-21**

*In final words to his disciples on the night of his arrest, Jesus encourages obedience to his commandments and speaks of the Spirit, who will be with them forever.*

[Jesus said to the disciples:] <sup>15</sup>“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup>And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. <sup>17</sup>This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

<sup>18</sup>“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. <sup>19</sup>In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup>On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. <sup>21</sup>They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

*The evangelist placed the discourse of John 14 before the crucifixion and resurrection: recall that Jesus gives over his Spirit in John 19:30 and 20:22. The discourse, narrated as if it were a quotation from Jesus on Maundy Thursday, is a theological reflection by the Johannine community about the love that characterizes the Trinitarian church. Only John refers to the Spirit as “advocate,” meaning “one who is called alongside,” a title for a first-century Greco-Roman defense lawyer. Other translations prefer Comforter.*