

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Jun 5th 2014

The ten days between the Ascension and Pentecost is an interesting time in the liturgical year. Jesus has left and the Holy Spirit has not yet arrived. Today's readings bring us a trial of Paul, an intercession for protection and a prayer of Jesus. These readings are selective progressions of the Acts of the Apostles and John's Gospel. My reflections suggest that trying to develop a common theme for today's scripture passages may be tying an artificial bow on a place it does not really belong.

I can imagine myself in the role of Paul in today's first reading. He is a man on a mission who is obsessed with keeping it moving and growing. Paul occasionally walks into trouble, but he has a clever knack for finding a way out. My sense is sometimes he is looking to bring conflict to the center stage. During my first time reading through today's scripture, I could imagine Paul praying Psalm 16 for assistance and protection in his imprisonment. Subsequently I have begun to feel that Paul was not the innocent disciple caught in a trap that he could not have anticipated. In many ways, my reflection has left me with a Paul who has the air of Peter O'Toole in Lawrence of Arabia. My sense is that Paul brought himself to be in this situation to make a series of points to both those inside and outside the ranks of Jesus' followers. Paul's understanding of the place of the Gentiles in the Church is made clear as well as the central message of the resurrection.

In today's Gospel I can imagine myself as someone overhearing Jesus praying in the distance. This prayer is different from the prayer that Jesus teaches to the crowd. The Lord's Prayer is something that I can experience as an expression of my own feelings and desires. I cannot make the same personal connection with Jesus' prayer in today's Gospel. Still I can feel Jesus' acceptance of his role. This self-confidence serves as a source of inspiration creating a desire in me to express commitment. Although like Paul we hear a person on a mission, it has a tone differing in attitude from that of Paul.

In three days, the readings will break out of the current sequence. We will return to the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. On my personal faith journey, I find the high point of the year to be Pentecost. This is the day that faith is strengthened. The experience of a resurrected Jesus is Paul's message. With the Ascension the disciples are left alone until the Holy Spirit arrives. I can relate to the Apostles gathered in an upper room feeling uncertain about their direction.

My prayer today is an expression of desire for the Holy Spirit. I do not have the confidence of Jesus or Paul. I have doubts and worries. I do not pray for the ability to put aside these failings that hold me back. Instead I pray for the pending gift of the Spirit to confront and overcome my weaknesses.

Jesus and your Saint Paul, you provide the examples of lives of faith and commitment. I am weak and uncertain. I ask for your intercession that I may share your commitment to action and the internal joy

that the Holy Spirit may bring. In the words that I remember from the Church of my childhood: Veni, Sancte Spiritus.

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