

FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY

21st – 28th May 2023

Collect for the Week

Graciously hear our supplications, O Lord, so that we, who believe that the Saviour of the human race is with you in glory, may experience, as he promised, until the end of the world, his abiding presence among us. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever

Monday in the Seventh Week of Easter

Reading

Acts 19:1-8 (RSV)

While Apol'los was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. ² And he said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' And they said, 'No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' ³ And he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' They said, 'Into John's baptism.' ⁴ And Paul said, 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.' ⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. ⁷ There were about twelve of them in all.

⁸ And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, arguing and pleading about the kingdom of God.

Reflection

THE SECOND half of the Acts of the Apostles is really the story of St Paul, his missionary journeys, and his eventual arrest and final journey to Rome. We must take the Gospel of St Luke and the Book of Acts as a two-part work (the opening of Acts says as much). The two halves – St Luke’s Gospel - represent the journey of a rabbi from Galilee to his arrest and death in Jerusalem, the centre of the Jewish world, and – the Acts of the Apostles - the journey of St Paul and the Apostolic Church from Jerusalem to Rome, the centre of the known world, the Gentile world.

In Acts 19 – this morning’s first reading – we find Paul in Ephesus. We are still very much as the Jewish stage of the Christian mission in that Paul’s preaching during his three-month stay in Ephesus is based in the synagogue there, amongst the Jews of the diaspora.

The information we are given is intriguing: there are disciples here who have undergone the baptism of repentance, as preached by John the Baptist, but have yet to experience the Holy Spirit. Indeed they are not aware that there is a ‘Holy Spirit’. When they hear Paul proclaim the Gospel, they are moved to be baptised in the name of Jesus, and to receive the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. These gifts include the gift of prophecy and the gift of speaking in tongues – gifts which will be all too prominent as we reflect in the coming days on the promise of Pentecost.

Tuesday in the Seventh Week of Easter

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Reading

Acts 20:17-27 (RSV)

Paul’s Journey to Jerusalem

¹⁷ From Mile’tus Paul sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. ¹⁸ And when they came to him, he said to them:

‘You yourselves know how I lived among you all the time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which befell me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, ²¹ testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance to God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. ²² And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, bound in the Spirit, not knowing

what shall befall me there; ²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. ²⁴ But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. ²⁵ And now, behold, I know that all you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will see my face no more. ²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, ²⁷ for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

Reflection

SOME commentators refer to this passage – and its continuation tomorrow – as St Paul’s ‘Final Discourse’. Before the final events set out in the Acts of the Apostles – appearances before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa, the eventful sea voyage and shipwreck on Malta, and the journey to Rome – Paul sets out his testament to the elders of the Church in Ephesus. Such a ‘testament’ or ‘Final Discourse’ was a literary convention of the time, and we find it in both Jewish and pagan sources. The point of the ‘Final Discourse’ is partly to give an account of oneself – put one’s case – and partly an opportunity to give instruction to others – disciples, followers, listeners, readers. But St Luke is not giving us anything formulaic: in the Book of Acts he gives significant speeches to Stephen and Peter as well as to Paul, and each is very different and expresses distinctive personalities and circumstances. Today’s passage explains why Paul feels he must go to Jerusalem, an explanation which gives him the opportunity to give an account of himself, his ministry, mission, and motives.

Wednesday in the Seventh Week of Easter

Reading

Acts 20:28-38 (RSV)

Paul addresses the Church in Ephesus

²⁸ Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians, to feed the church of the Lord which he obtained with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not

cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. ³²And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. ³⁴You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities, and to those who were with me. ³⁵In all things I have shown you that by so toiling one must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

³⁶And when he had spoken thus, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷And they all wept and embraced Paul and kissed him, ³⁸sorrowing most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they should see his face no more. And they brought him to the ship.

Reflection

PAUL'S 'Final Discourse', which we began yesterday and continued today, was his last meeting with the Church in Ephesus. They knew that it was the last they would see of Paul, about to be on his way to Rome, to claim his privilege under the law as a Roman Citizen. He includes a saying of Jesus – 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'. It is not a strange thing for Jesus to have said. The strange thing is that we don't find it in the Gospels, so there is no other record of him saying it. Paul is concerned to remind the Church that he was self-supporting in his ministry and particularly concerned for the weak. He warns them of what may come afterwards, as fierce wolves will attack them, not sparing the flock. Everyone in Christian ministry – and St Paul is no exception – is always aware, and somewhat concerned, that those who follow on may not maintain what has been established. It is, however, part of the vitality of the Church that every new bishop, every new priest, every new baptised member of the flock will bring change. As someone said to me about something entirely different, the only constant thing is change.

Thursday in the Seventh Week of Easter

Reading

Acts 22:30; 23:6-11 (RSV)

On the morrow, desiring to know the real reason why the Jews accused Paul, the tribune unbound him, and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet, and he brought Paul down and set him before them...

⁶But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, 'Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead I am on trial.'⁷And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. ⁸For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. ⁹Then a great clamour arose; and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended, 'We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?' ¹⁰And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn in pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them and bring him into the barracks.

¹¹The following night the Lord stood by him and said, 'Take courage, for as you have testified about me at Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also at Rome.'

Reflection

WE ARE heading for the climax of the Acts of the Apostles. Paul, arrested because of the agitation of the Jewish leaders, is hauled before the Sanhedrin. St Luke's mention of the Sanhedrin here reminds us of the trial of Jesus. This high-ranking court has proved itself twice over to be an undisciplined rabble. Similarly, St Luke does not highly rate the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees believe some of the right things but come to the wrong conclusion. The Sadducees, whom he mentions just once, are simply wrong. Paul noticed – and took advantage of – the differences between Pharisees (of which Paul had been one himself before his conversion) and the Sadducees. Pharisees believed in life after death and Sadducees didn't. Unsurprisingly, when he explains himself, Paul elicits some support from the Pharisees. 'What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?', they say. The quarrel turned violent and the tribune ordered that Paul be taken to the barracks. Earlier we had seen Paul claiming to be by birth a Roman citizen and those who could say 'Cives Romanus sum' – I am a Roman citizen – had particular rights. One right was to be tried for crimes in front of the Roman Emperor, which led to Paul being taken off to Rome.

It is hard to read St Luke – the Gospel as well as the Acts of the Apostles – without being struck by some of the difficulties the Christian mission faced. Leaving aside the fundamental fact of the Crucifixion of Jesus, a fact which St Paul calls 'a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles' (1 Cor 1:23), we see the new Christian movement, inspired by the Holy Spirit,

nonetheless meeting some real obstacles. Chief of these is the lack of headway the Gospel makes with Israel, God's own people. We have a series of setbacks: the martyrdom of the new deacon, Stephen (Acts 7); the martyrdom of James and the imprisonment of Peter (Acts 12); the uproar in Thessalonica (Acts 17); the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19); the arrest of Paul and the shipwreck on Malta, en route for Rome (Acts 27). The final difficulty - the beheading of Paul - is after the Book of Acts has ended. All we have is a final verse that tells us that Paul lived in Rome for 'two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered' (Acts 28:30). The pattern of setbacks and suffering features throughout Christian history. The victory of the Gospel is a triumph indeed but it is a triumph amidst adversity.

Friday in the Seventh Week of Easter

Reading

John 21:15-25 (RSV)

Peter is given Pastoral Charge

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' ¹⁶ A second time he said to him, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. ¹⁸ Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go.' ¹⁹ (This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God.) And after this he said to him, 'Follow me.'

Jesus and the Beloved Disciple

²⁰ Peter turned and saw following them the disciple whom Jesus loved, who had lain close to his breast at the supper and had said, 'Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?' ²¹ When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, 'Lord, what about this man?' ²² Jesus said to him, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!' ²³ The saying spread abroad

among the brethren that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?'

²⁴ This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things; and we know that his testimony is true.

²⁵ But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

Reflection

HAVING spent quite some time in the Easter season with the Acts of the Apostles and St John's Gospel, we would reach the end of both books on Saturday. Accordingly, I have extended today's Gospel to give us the final verses of St John. (If you want to finish off Acts, the Saturday passage begins at 28:16.) I have chosen today to reflect on the Gospel, partly because the scene was set on Thursday's reading from Acts for Paul's departure for Rome, and though we hear of a shipwreck on the way on the Island of Malta and of his house arrest in Rome for a couple of years, we don't hear from Acts about his execution. In that sense, we have less than the full story.

We don't quite hear from St John's Gospel what eventually happens to Peter and John, the Beloved Disciple. We hear in today's Gospel that Peter who denied knowing his Lord three times after Jesus was arrested is three times given chance to profess his love and devotion, and three times is given a commission to care for the sheep and lambs of God's pasture. We also hear implicitly that Peter will suffer martyrdom: "When you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go." (This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God.)' We find out later that Peter was crucified under Nero in between AD 64 and AD 68. The tradition is that the execution took place at what is now called St Peter's Square: the spot is mark by an Egyptian obelisk, 25 metres high, erected in 1586. The grave of Peter is deep below St Peter's Basilica.

Peter and Paul were martyred at about the same time. Peter was crucified, apparently upside down, but Paul, the Roman citizen, had the right be beheaded, a death no doubt much quicker and more dignified. We find Peter enquiring of Jesus what will happen to the Beloved Disciple. The

slightly enigmatic reply - 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!' – led many to speculate that John would not see death. This, says the Evangelist, was not accurate, but John's natural death showed us that it is not only martyrs who are saints.

The May Magnificat

Gerard Manley Hopkins SJ
(1844–89)

MAY is Mary's month, and I
Muse at that and wonder why:
Her feasts follow reason,
Dated due to season—

Candlemas, Lady Day;
But the Lady Month, May,
Why fasten that upon her,
With a feasting in her honour?

Is it only its being brighter
Than the most are must delight
her?

Is it opportunist
And flowers finds soonest?

Ask of her, the mighty mother:
Her reply puts this other
Question: What is Spring?—
Growth in every thing—

Flesh and fleece, fur and feather,
Grass and greenworld all
together;
Star-eyed strawberry-breasted
Throstle above her nested

Cluster of bugle blue eggs thin
Forms and warms the life within;
And bird and blossom swell
In sod or sheath or shell.

All things rising, all things sizing
Mary sees, sympathising
With that world of good,
Nature's motherhood.

Their magnifying of each its kind
With delight calls to mind
How she did in her stored
Magnify the Lord.

Well but there was more than
this:
Spring's universal bliss
Much, had much to say
To offering Mary May.

When drop-of-blood-and-foam-
dapple
Bloom lights the orchard-apple
And thicket and thorp are merry
With silver-surfed cherry

And azuring-over greybell makes
Wood banks and brakes wash
wet like lakes
And magic cuckoocall
Caps, clears, and clinches all—

This ecstasy all through
mothering earth
Tells Mary her mirth till Christ's
birth
To remember and exultation
In God who was her salvation.