

# FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY

14<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> May 2023

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## Monday in the Sixth Week of Easter

### Collect

GRANT, O merciful God, that we may experience at all times the fruit produced by the Paschal observances. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### Reading

*John 15:26 – 16:4 (RSV)*

*The Spirit of Truth will bear witness to the Risen Lord*

Jesus said to his disciples: 'When the Counsellor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; **27** and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning.

**16** 'I have said all this to you to keep you from falling away. **2** They will put you out of the synagogues; indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. **3** And they will do this because they have not known the Father, nor me. **4** But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you of them.'

### Reflection

*The Spirit of Truth*

TODAY'S Gospel continues with the Lord's teaching about the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete – translated variously as Counsellor, Comforter and Advocate. I think we can see once more that 'Advocate' is probably the closest translation because the Holy Spirit is the one who 'bears witness to' Christ and assists Christ's followers also to be 'witnesses'. This is not a new idea. We recall a phrase from the Advent Prose. 'You are my witnesses,' says the

LORD, 'and my servant whom I have chosen' (Isaiah 43:10). The vocation of God's servant-people is to be witnesses to the Gospel. It is a costly vocation. As the Lord makes clear, some will lose their lives bearing witness in this way.

The three days – Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday – leading to Ascension Day, which is now on Thursday, used to be known as 'Rogation Days', days originally part of the Calendar of Pagan Rome, praying for good weather and a successful harvest. Many of us, living, as we do, in a rural parish, will want to remember this older meaning, especially as we reflect, more than we usually have to, on how dependent we are on the natural world in which we live.

## **Tuesday in the Sixth Week of Easter**

### **Collect**

Grant, almighty and merciful God, that we may in truth receive a share in the resurrection of Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### **Reading**

*Acts 16:22-34 (RSV)*

*Paul and Silas escape from jail*

<sup>22</sup>The crowd in Philippi joined in attacking Paul and Silas; and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. <sup>23</sup>And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely. <sup>24</sup>Having received this charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

<sup>25</sup>But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, <sup>26</sup>and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and every one's fetters were unfastened. <sup>27</sup>When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup>But Paul cried with a loud voice, 'Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.' <sup>29</sup>And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, <sup>30</sup>and brought them out and said, 'Men, what must I do to be saved?' <sup>31</sup>And they said, 'Believe

in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.' <sup>32</sup> And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house. <sup>33</sup> And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, with all his family. <sup>34</sup> Then he brought them up into his house, and set food before them; and he rejoiced with all his household that he had believed in God.

## Reflection

*'Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved'*

THE 'Lockdown' drew attention to a particular term – the household – not previously in very common use. Married couples, families, and various domestic arrangements are part of everyday experience but how often have we drawn attention to 'the household'? It is a biblical term – maybe 120 references, a third of them in the New Testament – and usually referring to a decidedly patriarchal arrangement in which a man presides over his household. On three occasions we are interested to discover that 'household' is a term for the Church. The Church is 'the household of faith' (Gal 6:10). It is 'the household of God' (Eph 2:15 and 1 Tim 3:15). This sense of us all being together in God's household is a major incentive for looking after one another – and others. 'As we have opportunity', says Gal 6:10, 'let us do good to everyone, especially to those who are of the household of faith'.

So, as we became more aware of the 'household' – those with whom we share a house – we need to look beyond to 'the household of God' with whom we long to share the gift of Holy Communion, itself a major fruit – but not the main or sole fruit – of Holy Mass. But we need also to reflect on our own households – whether there are many or few – and, if we live alone, on our less visible links with others, our families and friends, our loved ones living and departed.

But a word about the patriarchy bit... We notice that, though things are cast in a pre-modern understanding of patriarchy – with the man having the franchise, the ownership, and the revenue, the Bible is always careful to talk about the duties of marriage partners to each other and to those who depend on them. Furthermore, as the story of the Jailer this morning shows, the conversion of a man is the salvation of his household. Neither is this just that way round. I see quite a few women whose faith is – or will be – please God, the salvation of their household.

# Wednesday in the Sixth Week of Easter

## Collect

Grant, we pray, O Lord, that, as we celebrate in mystery the solemnities of your Son's Resurrection, so, too, we may be worthy to rejoice at his coming with all the saints. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Reading

*Acts 16:22-34 (RSV)*

### *Paul in Athens*

<sup>15</sup> Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed....<sup>22</sup> So Paul, standing in the middle of the Are-op'agus, said: 'Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. <sup>23</sup> For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. <sup>24</sup> The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, <sup>25</sup> nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. <sup>26</sup> And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, <sup>27</sup> that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, <sup>28</sup> for

'In him we live and move and have our being';

as even some of your poets have said,

'For we are indeed his offspring.'

<sup>29</sup> Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, a representation by the art and imagination of man. <sup>30</sup> The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent, <sup>31</sup> because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead.'

<sup>32</sup> Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said, 'We will hear you again about this.' <sup>33</sup> So Paul went out from among them. <sup>34</sup> But some men joined him and believed, among them Dionys'ius the Are-op'agite and a woman named Dam'aris and others with them. **18** After this he left Athens and went to Corinth.

## Reflection

**PAUL'S** preaching to the Men of Athens is a scene in which a Jewish prophet confronts, and engages in dialogue with, the cultured philosophers of the

Gentile world. 'Areopogus' might be the place – Mars Hill – or it may be the meeting-place of the learned. These include Epicureans and Stoics. Both schools had about three centuries of learning: the Epicureans were happy to disregard religious explanations; the Stoics were pious but not in ways which would lead them to take seriously the claims of a crucified Jew.

What is fascinating about the encounter is, first, that, in neither the Jewish academic world nor in Gentile circles, does Christianity cut through. We are familiar enough nowadays with clever people discounting the Gospel message but it is rather astonishing to see how influential Christianity has been, throughout the known world since the fourth century. The second thing that is fascinating is that St Luke, the author of Acts, hardly grapples with pagan philosophy beyond reflecting that the 'statue to an unknown God, on which Paul bases his message, is the one 'in [whom] we live and move and have our being'. Typical of Jewish thought, the thing that Paul fixes on is the idolatry of the Gentile world. 'Being God's...offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, a representation by the art and imagination of man.'

The crisis point in the encounter with the Men of Athens is when Paul mentions the Resurrection of the Dead. Some mock. Others reserve judgment until they hear more. A group – presumably small, because we hear no more about them, and they are sufficiently small for a couple of names to be singled out – repent and believe the Gospel. What we can take away from this encounter is that there is nothing new under the sun. Our proclamation of the Gospel will be hard going when we are with those whose academic defences are in place. Some will mock. Many will profess to be agnostic – not knowing what to make of it and perhaps thinking that it is not possible to be anything other than uncertain of what to make of it. A few will hear the Gospel and take its Good News to heart, especially its Good News that, in Christ, we share the hope of the Resurrection.

## **The Ascension of the Lord**

### **Collect**

Gladden us with holy joys, almighty God, and make us rejoice with devout thanksgiving, for the Ascension of Christ your Son is our exultation and, where the Head has gone before in glory, the Body is called to follow in hope. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever

### **Reading**

*Matthew 28:16-20 (RSV)*

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw him they worshipped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of

the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age.'

## Reflection

*What comes down must go up....*

**IT WAS** all very simple when the Gospels were first written down: heaven is up there and earth is down here. At Christmas we sing 'He came down to earth from heaven' and today, Ascension Day, we sing 'Hail! the day that sees him rise, to his throne beyond the skies. Christ, the Lamb for sinners given, enters now the highest heaven.' We often say 'what goes up must come down' – a bit of a comfort when a ball gets temporarily stuck in the branches of a tree. Perhaps we ought also to say that, 'when it comes to God, what comes down must go up'. God came down from heaven and became a human being – just like us, without the sins and the mistakes – so that we can go up to heaven – just like God, so without sins and mistakes.

What's made this very simple message a bit harder to understand is that – unlike Mrs Alexander and Charles Wesley who wrote those old and much-loved hymns a very long time ago – we do know that it's not all about coming down and going up. If a football team does badly, it faces 'relegation' – a posh word for 'going down'. If it does well, it faces 'promotion' – a posh word for going up in the league tables. The 'going up' and 'coming down' work well as images. Prices go up and come down. The marks we get for our work go up and come down.

How we deal with this change of understanding about how the universe works does depend on other things too. I am old enough to remember who orbited the earth in a space capsule in April 1961: the first man in space. He was a Russian. Eight years later I watched Apollo 11 in 1969 do the first manned moon landing. The crew got out and walked about on the surface of the moon. If I remember rightly, the Russian mission 'proved' that there was no heaven up there. The Americans, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, looked out from their space craft at the earth, some distance away from them in space and recited the first verse of the Bible. 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth'. So we are not going to get to the bottom of things with science and exploration. They teach us what there is and how it works. What we need to find out is why things are as they are and why they work that way.

There is a very good word for the fact that God became fully human in Jesus' incarnation and we become fully divine in Jesus' ascension. That word is 'atonement' – 'at-one-ment'. If you make French dressing, there is no hiding the fact that oil and vinegar are very different and you start out with them being different, and without a bit of care, they separate out again. But, mixed together, they become a very nice dressing for your salad, with a few fancy bits thrown in. In the ascension of Jesus we are

made one with God. Like the prayer the priest says at the altar during mass: 'by the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity'. What comes down must go up....

## Friday in the Sixth Week of Easter

### Collect

O God, who restore us to eternal life in the Resurrection of Christ: raise us up, we pray, to the author of our salvation, who is seated at your right hand, so that when our Saviour comes again in majesty, those you have given new birth in Baptism may be clothed with blessed immortality. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen. Amen.

### Reading

*Acts 18:1-18 (RSV)*

*Paul in Corinth and his return to Antioch*

**18** After this he left Athens and went to Corinth. **2** And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them; **3** and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them, and they worked, for by trade they were tentmakers. **4** And he argued in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Greeks.

**5** When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedo'nia, Paul was occupied with preaching, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. **6** And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be upon your heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.' **7** And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius<sup>[a]</sup> Justus, a worshiper of God; his house was next door to the synagogue. **8** Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. **9** And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; **10** for I am with you, and no man shall attack you to harm you; for I have many people in this city.' **11** And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

**12** But when Gallio was proconsul of Acha'ia, the Jews made a united attack upon Paul and brought him before the tribunal, **13** saying, 'This man is persuading men to worship God contrary to the law.' **14** But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, 'If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, I should have reason to bear with you, O Jews; **15** but since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves; I refuse to be a judge of these things.' **16** And he drove them from the tribunal. **17** And they all seized

Sos'thenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to this.

**18** After this Paul stayed many days longer, and then took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cen'chreae he cut his hair, for he had a vow.

## **Reflection**

ST PAUL'S stay in Corinth gives us important information. We hear about Paul being hauled up before the tribunal of the Roman proconsul – Gallio – who declines to get involved in Jewish religious disputes of this kind: we have yet to reach the time of persecution of Christians. The Gallio incident tells us that we are in the years 51-52 AD, so just less than twenty years after the Crucifixion and Resurrection. We also know that Paul writes the First Letter to the Thessalonians in Corinth – and we can date this as the earliest book of the New Testament. Later in his life, of course, Paul corresponds with the Corinthians.

Apart from dating Paul's journeys, we find out something about Paul's co-workers. In Corinth he meets Aquila and Priscilla – whom he calls 'Prisca' – who hail from Rome and are there in Rome to support him when he reaches there (Rom 16:3). We find out that Paul earns his living by tent-making – a self-supporting minister of the Gospel. The intriguing reference at the end of the passage to Paul cutting his hair almost certainly refers to his own action, rather than, say, visiting a hairdresser, and is probably related to the Nazarite practices of Numbers 6. This form of asceticism was integral to Judaism: allowing the hair to grow during a period when one abstained from food and strong drink is found, for example, in the lives of both Samson and St John the Baptist.



## 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-surfèd 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.