

5th Sunday of Easter, Year A
Acts 6:1-7
Ps 33 *passim*
1Pet 2:4-9
Jn 14:1-12

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Here it is, the 5th Sunday of Easter. Four weeks since Easter – enough time for the Easter candle to burn down; not a stub yet but it's burned down to a more manageable size.

The first reading on Sunday is usually drawn from the Old Testament. But during these Sundays of Easter our first reading has been coming from the Acts of the Apostles. Acts is St. Luke's sequel to his Gospel; it tells the story of the very earliest days, when the followers of Jesus came to see themselves as something more than just another branch of Judaism, to see themselves as Church.

Up to now everything in Acts has been going fine. Over the past few weeks we've heard St. Peter preaching boldly and fearlessly – the same Peter who denied Jesus three times on Good Friday and then ran away in shame. And we're told that thousands and thousands of people were becoming followers of Jesus. Today we hear for the first time about growing pains in the early Christian community, having to do with two separate constituencies, the Hebrews and the Hellenists. They're all Jewish, but the native language of the Hellenists is Greek. It turns out the Greek-speaking widows aren't being treated as well as the Hebrew-speaking widows, and that's not fair. Look at how they deal with the problem. Peter is their spokesman, but he's not the one in charge; the decision is made by the whole community. And they decide to select leaders from among the Greek-speaking members – their names are all Greek – whom the apostles then commission and charge with the responsibility of caring for the poor and the needy.

In our second reading, the first letter of St. Peter tells us how the Church is constructed. Jesus himself, a living stone, is the cornerstone. With Jesus as the cornerstone, we ourselves are living stones built up into a spiritual house, St. Peter says. We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.

Our Gospel reading today is from the 14th chapter of the Gospel of John. It's about the Last Supper. In chapter 13, the chapter just before, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples and then announced that one of them would betray him. He sends Judas out to do what Judas is going to do, and with that the 14th chapter takes up Jesus's final discourse.

Jesus begins by saying farewell. Later, on Easter Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene encounters the risen Lord Jesus in the garden but she does not recognize him. When he calls her by name, she reaches out but he tells her not to cling to him because, he says, "I have not yet ascended to the Father." Jesus rises in glory, yes, but he is different. He's no longer, after the Resurrection, the same old Jesus they have known and loved. And

so he is genuinely saying good-bye at the Last Supper. Jesus tells the disciples that, like the bridegroom who goes away to prepare the home where he and his bride will begin their married life, he is going to prepare a place for his faithful followers. "In my Father's house," he says, "there are many dwelling places." Not guestrooms. Not spare rooms. Dwelling places. The Father dwells in Jesus and Jesus dwells in the Father. And in the next chapter, chapter 15, Jesus invites us to dwell in him, just as he dwells in us.

As fully initiated Christians, baptized, confirmed, and welcomed at the Lord's Table, we dwell in Jesus. Our relationship to Jesus, in God's grace, is like Jesus's relationship with the Father. Philip asks, "Just one more thing, Jesus, before you go: just show us the Father." Jesus's response? Philip, Philip, Philip! "You see me, you see the Father." Not that Jesus *is* the Father, mind you; he is not. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct. BUT they are not separate. All the time we say "separate and distinct," like two synonyms, and they usually are synonyms, but not in this case. The persons of the Trinity are distinct from one another – but never separate. In the Eucharist we receive Jesus, the risen Lord Jesus, but where Jesus is the Father and the Holy Spirit are never far off.

Jesus is the fullness of God's self-revelation. We want to know what the Father has to say? Listen to Jesus. We want to know what the Father is like? Look at Jesus. We want to know what the Father wants us to do? to know who God is? Listen to Jesus and look at Jesus. Jesus is the way. Jesus is truth. Jesus is life.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, when he went back to his Father to prepare a dwelling place for each of us, he passed the baton to us, his Church, to bring his work on earth to fulfillment. The Church, constructed of living stones, is the extension of Jesus through time and space. Jesus foresaw the growth and spread of his Church when he said, "Whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father."

One final note: it takes a great lady to manage and preside over a great house, a house comprising many dwelling places. In the case of the Father's house, that great lady is the Mother whom Jesus, while hanging on the Cross, entrusted to the care of his beloved disciple. He appointed St. John, in the name of all of us, to be Mary's child. And he told Mary to be the mother of John and, through John, of all of us. May is her month, the month dedicated to the Blessed Mother. St. Elizabeth declared her cousin Mary to be blessed among all women, and in Mary all women are blessed in turn.

On this special Sunday in May, we honor our mothers, we honor the mothers of our children, and we honor all who nurture and give care, of either gender. Happy Mother's Day! Happy Mother's Day to all!