

6th Sunday of Easter Cycle A (May 17th, 2020)

After the ordination of the Greek speaking men that we heard about last Sunday, the Book of Acts goes on to tell us about the preaching and martyrdom of Stephen, one of the seven. That marked the start of a persecution in Jerusalem, which caused the church to spread beyond the city to Judea and then to Samaria.⁵ Today we hear the story of Philip, another of the seven assistants.¹²

Acts 8:5-8, 14-17

5Philip This is the deacon Philip, not the Apostle.¹ **went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Christ to them.** Christ Himself had first brought the Good News to the Samaritans, the only people in the world not accepted in Jerusalem as Jews who nevertheless observed the Law of Moses and shared the hope of the coming Messiah.¹

6With one accord the crowds paid attention to what was said by Philip when they heard it and saw the signs he was doing. This suggests an instance of an early Church saying: “The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians.” This reaction of the people in Samaria to the preaching about Christ was thought to be the fruit of the seed sown by St. Stephen in his martyrdom for Christ.¹¹

7For unclean spirits, crying out in a loud voice, The sign of a successful exorcism is some sort of physical manifestation.⁴ **came out of many possessed people, and many paralyzed or crippled people were cured.** Philip’s wonderworking of exorcisms and healings shows continuity with the ministry of Jesus and continues to represent the kingdom of God’s battle against the demonic realm.⁴

8There was great joy in that city.

14Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, The apostles are called to examine and endorse this new development of bringing the first non-Jews into the family of faith.²

15who went down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit,

16for it had not yet fallen upon any of them; The coming of the Holy Spirit was marked by some visible, observable manifestation such as tongues or prophecy.¹³ **they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.** A distinction is made in Acts between Baptism, which confers the Spirit in an invisible way and the laying on of hands, which calls down the Spirit to manifest his presence in a visible and charismatic way. The Church has traditionally linked this conferral of the Spirit through the imposition of hands with Confirmation, a sacrament that follows Baptism and is an essential part of the whole process of Christian initiation. As in this episode, deacons like Philip can baptize, but it belongs to the bishops like Peter and John to bestow a fuller measure of the Spirit on the baptized by the laying on of hands.²

17Then they laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. Note that the two apostles do not re-baptize but confirm.¹² There is such a close connection between Baptism and Confirmation, that in the early centuries of Christianity, Confirmation was administered immediately after Baptism. Pope John Paul II explains that all Christians are consecrated to God by their Baptism and they are called to profess that faith which they have received. The sacrament of Confirmation gives them special strength to be witnesses of Christ and sharers in his mission of salvation. It inserts each baptized person into the apostolate of the Church and reminds them that they have a vocation to holiness.³

1 Peter 3:15-18

In the introduction to the first reading today we heard about the start of the persecutions of the early church. We now hear St. Peter's instructions on the Christian approach to persecution.¹² The Christian life is not always easy and here Peter recommends the practice of goodness in the face of persecution and the remembrance of the blessing that such suffering brings.⁶

Beloved:

15 Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. The word "sanctify" seems odd here but it means to reverence Christ as our Lord.⁵ **Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope,** Didymus the Blind wrote from Alexandria in the fourth century: "We must be so well instructed in the knowledge of our faith that whenever anyone asks us about it we may be able to give them a proper answer and to do so with meekness and in the fear of God. For whoever says anything about God must do so as if God Himself were present to hear him."¹²

16 but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame. Let a man meet criticism with a life which is beyond reproach. Such conduct will silence slander and will disarm criticism. The only unanswerable argument for Christianity is a Christian life. It has been said that "A saint is someone whose life makes it easier to believe in God."⁷

17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that be the will of God, than for doing evil. In chapter 2 this instruction was directed to slaves but now it is made more general.⁶

18 For Christ also suffered for sins once, On the Cross God dealt with man's sin in a way which is adequate for all sin, for all men, for all time.⁷ This is so awesome that we remember and make present the Sacrifice of the Cross in an unbloody way at EVERY mass that is said and the power of the sacrifice is APPLIED to the forgiveness of the sins that we daily commit!⁸ (CCC 1366) **the righteous** (This is the early Church's descriptive term for Jesus.¹² **for the sake of the unrighteous, that he might lead you to God.** Christ's death was not only a model, but gave men new access to God. By taking upon Himself the covenant curse brought upon mankind by the sin of Adam, Christ broke down the barrier between God and man.¹² This consolation is offered as a reason for suffering.⁶ **Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the Spirit.** Just as Jesus triumphed, so will they. Their baptism is the pledge of their triumph, for it gives them a share in his resurrection. Jesus was put to death as far as his earthly existence was concerned, yet he was made to live spiritually.⁶

John 14: 15-21

This is a continuation of our gospel reading for last week. The setting is the Last Supper, just after Judas has left and Jesus has told the remaining eleven that he must soon depart too.¹²

Jesus said to his disciples:

15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. For Jesus, love and law are not opposed, they are vitally linked.¹¹ His commandments are not simply moral precepts for they involve a whole way of life in loving union with him.¹⁶ The Law of the Gospel "fulfills", refines, surpasses, and leads the Old Law to its perfection.⁸ (CCC 1967) It does not add new external precepts, but proceeds to reform the heart, the root of human acts, where man chooses between the pure and the impure, where faith, hope, and charity are formed and with them the other virtues. The Gospel thus brings

the Law to its fullness through imitation of the perfection of the heavenly Father, through forgiveness of enemies and prayer for persecutors.⁸ (CCC 1968) The entire Law of the Gospel is contained in the “new commandment” of Jesus, to love one another as he has loved us.⁸ (CCC 1970) However, it is wrong to think of Christianity as “easy,” requiring only pleasant feelings of love but no actions to prove it. Dake’s Annotated Reference Bible lists 1,050 New Testament commands, which, according to this verse, are to be obeyed by those who love God.¹⁴ The negative prohibitions are now positive requirements. The Old Law is made new in Christ. What was external law, is now internal action; what was commanded with no grace or strength provided, is now commanded with grace and the Spirit provided; what was once a negative prohibition, is now a positive command of action. The law has not been changed. The coin has only flipped from the “letter-side” to the “spirit-side” of the Law. Jesus came to fulfill the Law, to give it to us in its fullness, not to take it away.¹⁵

16And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate Jesus has been the first Advocate.¹² “another Advocate” refers to the Holy Spirit because He will be given to them in Christ’s place as Advocate or Defender to help them since Jesus is going to ascend to heaven. It is now the role of the Holy Spirit to guide, protect and enliven the Church.¹⁰ to be with you always, The Holy Spirit is thus revealed as another divine person with Jesus and the Father.⁸ (CCC 243)

17the Spirit of truth, This title defines the role of the Paraclete in guiding the Church in truth.⁶ **whom the world cannot accept,** Neither could the world accept the Son, refusing to see in him the revelation of the Father.¹² **because it neither sees nor knows him.** The presence of the Spirit will be visible, as was the true nature of Christ, only to the eye of faith.⁶ **But you know him, because he remains with you,** This refers to the Spirit’s presence both in the Church and in every Christians.⁶ **and will be in you.** This refers to Christ’s personal presence dwelling within each of God’s children individually. For this reason both the universal Church and individual Christians can be called “temples” of the Spirit.⁹

18I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. When Jesus withdraws his visible presence from the world, he does not withdraw his spiritual presence. Christ is always present in his Church, especially in the liturgy, where he ministers through his priests, speaks through the Scriptures, and sanctifies us through the sacraments.⁹

19In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me, They will see through the eyes of faith for Jesus will depart shortly from the sight of the world.¹² **because I live and you will live.** Jesus will return to be with them again, in fact, he will see them after the Resurrection when he appears to them over a period of forty days. When he ascends into heaven they will see him no longer yet Jesus will continue to be in the midst of his disciples in his Church. We will also see him face to face in heaven when we die. St. Augustine explains that we know now by believing whereas then we shall know by beholding. As long as we are in our corruptible body, which weighs down the soul, we are making our way towards the Lord: for we walk by faith, not by sight. But in heaven we shall see him directly, we shall see him as he is.¹⁰

20On that day This is traditional language for the day of Judgment or the end of the world.⁶ **you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you.** The Father, the Son, and the Church share the one life.⁶

21Whoever has my commandments and observes them It is not sufficient merely to acknowledge the law of Christ, one must also observe it in their life.¹² **is the one who loves me.** OBEDIENCE is the proof of love, which in turn makes possible the communion between God and man. THE

CONDITION of the shared life which is promised is LOVE AND OBEDIENCE.¹² **And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him.** Obedience is the proof of love, which in turn makes possible the communion between God and man.⁶

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) "The Founding of Christendom" by Warren H. Carroll, (2) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles" with Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (3) "The Navarre Bible: Acts Of The Apostles," (4) "The Acts of the Apostles" by Luke Timothy Johnson, (5) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers" by Lawrence E. Mick, (6) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (7) "The Letters Of James And Peter" by William Barclay, (8) "The Catechism Of The Catholic Church," (9) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of John" with Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (10) "The Navarre Bible: St. John", (11) Commentary Notes of Tim Gray, (12) The St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology Online founded by Dr. Scott Hahn, (13) "Christian Initiation And Baptism In The Holy Spirit" by Kilian McDonnell and George T. Montague, (14) "Jewish New Testament Commentary" by David H. Stern, (15) "Catholic Bible Study: John" by Stephen K. Ray, and (16) "The Gospel According To John XIII-XXI" With Introduction And commentary By Raymond E. Brown.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.