

SUNDAY NOTES 24th MAY 2020

EASTER 7

Acts 1.12-14

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

1 Peter 4.13-16

But rejoice in so far as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief-maker. Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name.

John 17.1-11

Jesus looked up to heaven and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do.

So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.

I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.'

Introduction

After the Ascension, the Apostles returned to Jerusalem. They engaged in much prayer, described as "continuous" as they, with a mixture of emotions, awaited the Holy Spirit. The action of the Holy Spirit in our life is paramount. Indeed, without the aid of the "paraclete and counsellor" it is very difficult to see how an authentic Christian life can be accomplished. Anyone who has made serious attempts at living a spiritual life will know that without God's grace all comes to naught. We need a strength that we do not possess. It is especially in times of crisis that we are confronted with our limitations. The readings also touch on the vexed issue of "suffering". Why there should be suffering in God's creation is a deep philosophical and theological conundrum far beyond the space and scope of these notes. That suffering does indeed exist is not in doubt.....

First reading

Luke, the writer of the Acts of the Apostles, sets the dramatical stage for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Luke was anxious to emphasise the point that the birth pangs of the Church are to be found in the drama that unfolds. The action starts on the Mount of Olives which was the hill beyond the Kidron Valley east of

Jerusalem where the disciples had been with Jesus. The *upstairs room* was probably a bolt hole to hide and be safe from hostile neighbours. It is speculation as to whether this is the same room wherein they had celebrated the Passover or a room in the house of Mary, the aunt of Barnabas. They prayed because Jesus had established a pattern of prayer in the lives of the disciples. Notice they were not an exclusively male band and had women with them who had followed Jesus, supported him in his ministry and were there for him at his death. Notice also that the reference to Mary the Virgin is the last mention of His mother in the new testament.

Second Reading

Peter in this short passage refers to the stark reality of suffering in the life of the believer. His form of encouragement takes shape in his belief that although there may be suffering, joy and glory await the person who has remained faithful despite all the travails. Do you find this convincing?

The Gospel

We are presented with another part of the Farewell Discourse. This solemn prayer of Jesus has two parts. In the first five verses Jesus alludes to his 'hour'; that, of course, refers to his death and resurrection. On earth his task had been to point to the Father; in other words, to 'glorify' Him. Now the time has arrived for the Father to glorify the Son. The second part of this extract from the gospel has the opening section of an extended prayer Jesus prays regarding the disciples. His fervent desire is that they continue his work on earth. He had commended them all to his Father and now he prays that the Father will care for them just as the Father has cared for Jesus. If this pandemic has taught us anything then surely it has shown us how dependant we are upon each other and upon our civil institutions.