

ECHOING GOD'S WORD
in
THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY
SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
MAY 16, 2021

SCRIPTURES:

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| Acts 1:15-17, 20-26 | Another witness of Jesus' resurrection must be chosen. |
| 1 John 4:11-16 | We acknowledge Jesus as Son of God, so we live in God. |
| John 17:11-19 | Jesus prays that his followers may be holy. |
| Psalms 103:1-20 | We look to God's kindness and bless God's name. |

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

Read the Scriptures carefully in your group, beginning with the Gospel. Take a few minutes in silence to hear the Lord speaking to the heart. Remember that the word of God in the Bible is primarily addressed to the Church community. What does God want the community to hear today?

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:

John:

John the Evangelist ascends to the highest level in his soaring exposition of the inner reality of Jesus Christ. In the selection for today's lesson, Jesus is in the middle of Chapter 17, the Prayer of Consecration, or the High Priestly Prayer. Here we find Jesus the High Priest consecrating himself, and us, to priestly service before the Most High God.

In John's Gospel, Jesus cannot be without power: He takes charge of all that happens. Since he has been from the beginning the Eternal High Priest, he utters a priestly prayer: Consecration to God the Father.

Jesus High Priest reveals who God truly is to his disciples. He prays out loud to show the disciples what intimacy with God is about. "The world" in John is not necessarily the realm of evil or of Satan. It is the world of human society -- that which people have built. The world that humans have built is not evil in itself. The evil in it is the result of human sin. It can and must be redeemed. Evil is in the world but does not *define* the world as Jesus would have us see it. Jesus has brought God's presence into the world to give it a new reality. The divine is now in the world. If there is sin, it is only that we have put it back there.

The disciples are not disciples by virtue of human construct. God, not people, has made us disciples. So, we belong to God and not to "the world." We do not belong to the world because the world is what we have made. We belong to God because God has made us what we are.

There is no natural antagonism between the reality of our daily lives and the kingdom of God. Only if we give ourselves over to deliberate sin do we set up an alienation between God and the world in which we live.

Acts:

The Twelve seem to be a distinct group in the New Testament. The number twelve appears to have been highly significant to the early Christians. They surely function as a sign of the New Israel, the new "12 Tribes." When one has been lost, Judas, he needs to be replaced. But then, after this initial period, The Twelve ceased to function as such in the Church. After the New Israel has become recognized as God's people, there is no need to continue the specific office of the twelve leaders in real persons. Some might suggest that with the beginning of subtle forms of anti-Semitism in the Church, any reference to the 12 Tribes of Israel might be avoided. Notice that the community participates in the process of choosing a successor for Judas. The choice is an action both of God and of the people. Choosing leaders belongs by right to the people of the community. It is unfortunate that, for historical and political reasons, the choosing of Church leaders has been taken from the people.

1 John:

If love for one another is to be a sign that God lives in us, surely that love cannot be mere sentimentality or a transitory kind of feeling. Committed love, love that is willing to sacrifice, love that has been tested and found solid, that is the love by which God manifests God's presence. The Church today will be seen as God's Church only when there is love in it. Love must be so manifest that it shines forth to startle everyone. The only kind of love that ever startled anyone was the love that was willing to die for the one loved. That is the love which Jesus Christ brought to the world; it is the love we are challenged to bring.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what sense are we a priestly people, set apart from worldly interests, consecrated for God's purposes? Do you see yourself as a consecrated person, holy in the sight of God, set apart for holy purposes? Do you see the Church as deeply committed to God's purposes rather than its own interests?

2. What is this "Truth" of which Jesus speaks? How does the truth of our relationship with God reveal our call to holiness? Does holiness ring true in the life of the Church as you see it in your community of faith? What would the Church need to do to project a better image of holiness?

3. What evils are always lurking within the Christian community, threatening to corrupt and corrode the reality of holiness? What are the principal sins of the parish community to which you belong? What is there in your parish that obscures the holiness of Christ shining forth within it?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Share with others in your group how the presence of Jesus in your life has been a source of strength and support to you and your family. Share outside your group how your faith and your church has been important to you.

PRAYER

**“O Father most holy,
protect them with your name which you have given me,
that they may be one, even as we are one.
As long as I was with them,
I guarded them with your name which you gave me.”**
Prayer of Jesus: John 17: 11-12

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

Jesus Christ is the one High Priest established by God to offer intercession for all humans of all times. A priest is one who is set apart by God for God’s purposes among people on earth. Jesus in the resurrection participates in the life of God and is rooted by his humanness in the life of the human race. In his very being, the realms of heaven and of earth are joined. The priesthood of Jesus is one that the Father conferred on him when he sent him to be one of us.

The functions of a priest are those that have to do with the relationship between God and God’s people. One of the functions of a priest is to offer intercession for himself and for others. Jesus offers that eternal plea to the Father that we may be saved from everlasting damnation. When Jesus intercedes for us, surely the Father hears that prayer. In the Catholic tradition, human beings are chosen by God to represent Christ the High Priest in the midst of the assembly of faith. They are priests inasmuch as they participate through ordination in the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Jesus has shared with his disciples his own priestly function. All who are baptized into the body of Christ come to share in the priestly function of the body of Christ. It is the whole Christ that offers intercession in this world, Jesus Christ, the Head of the body and we, too, who are the members of the body. The intercessory prayer of the Church is truly the prayer of Christ, offered by Christ to the Father.

Laypersons, too, are members of the Church by virtue of initiation: baptism, confirmation and Eucharist. When the Church offers intercession in Christ, all the members of the Church share in that function as intercessors. Initiation into the Church has conferred that consecration into the priesthood of Christ. The Church, gathered as the body of Christ, prays the prayers of intercession for itself and for the whole world. Joined in the high priestly prayer of Jesus, the members of the Church have an awesome power in their prayer. The prayer of the assembly for any good cause is truly powerful before God. Christ himself utters that prayer.

The ordained priest in the community signifies Christ who is the invisible head of the Church. In the person of the ordained priest, Christ the High Priest calls the community together and “orders” it (orients it) toward God. Holy Orders orients the church assembly in the direction of God visibly. The whole Church is priestly.

The Catechism: # 1119

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