

Homily of Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year B, 2024

Acts 1:15-17, 20-26; Psalm 103:1-2, 11-12, 19-20; 1 John 4:11-16; John 17:11-19

We see in the first reading that St. Peter, now transformed by the power of the resurrection, took charge of the Christian community. The words of Jesus have come to fulfillment, "And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). St. Peter recalled the prophecy concerning Judas and his replacement in Psalm 109:8, "May his days be few; may another take his office."

St. Peter proceeded to give the community the directives and the criteria for electing Judas' replacement: one of the men well known to them, who had been a disciple the whole time, beginning from the baptism of John until the resurrection. Two men, Justus and Matthias, who met the criteria, were put forward. The disciples prayed and cast lots, and Matthias was chosen. The result was accepted by all. No deceiving and lying campaigns, no election irregularities, no controversial result, no violence. The election of Matthias stands as a model for all elections, civil or religious. The lack of integrity surrounding elections everywhere is a far cry from the election of Matthias.

St. John tells us in the second reading, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another" (1 John 4:11). Those who want to lead others must eschew self-interest and love those they want to lead by having their best interests at heart. Jesus gives the following rule, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:42-45).

Scripture scholars refer to John chapter 17 as Jesus' Great Intercessory Prayer or The High Priestly Prayer of Jesus. The entire chapter is Jesus' prayer in which he commended his disciples and all believers to his Father as his passion and death drew near. There are, at least, four prayer points in the gospel reading:

One: "Keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are" (verse 11). Jesus prays that we remain united in his name. We, therefore, pray for Christian unity and unity in our homes, communities, churches, and country instead of suspicion and antagonism. We pray for peace and unity in our world instead of war and destruction.

Two: "I speak this in the world so that they may share my joy completely" (verse 13). It is the prayer of Jesus that we share in his joy. Jesus prays in John 15:11 that his joy may be in us and that our joy may be complete. Nehemiah 8:10

says, "Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." May nothing take away the joy we have received from the Lord.

Three: "I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one" (verse 15). 1 John 5:19 acknowledges, "We know that we belong to God, and the whole world is under the power of the evil one." St. Paul, also, says, "For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens" (Ephesians 6:12). However, Jesus encourages us, "In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world" (John 16:33). Let us remain in him (the true vine) who is able to deliver those who remain in him.

Four: "Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth" (verse 17). Jesus prays that we are consecrated or sanctified in the truth. God's word is the best cleansing agent for our soul and body. Therefore, if we 'soak' ourselves in God's word, we will be sanctified. Jesus says, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Further, he says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:16). May Jesus the word made flesh (John 1:14) and the truth free us from all falsehood and all entanglements that we may live new life in a new way.

Next Sunday is Pentecost Sunday when we will celebrate the descent of the Holy Spirit. We are all encouraged to be drawn to the wonderful celebration. Everyone is invited to participate in a parish spiritual program for the celebration or a personal spiritual exercise. Remember the promise of Jesus, "If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the holy Spirit to those who ask him?" (Luke 11:13).

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