

## Sunday, May 21, 2023 – Seventh Sunday of Easter

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### Introduction

In these days between Ascension and Pentecost, we gather with the disciples in the upper room, waiting for the Spirit to transform the church around the world. In today's gospel Jesus prays for his followers and for their mission in his name. Amid religious, social, and economic divisions, we seek the unity that Jesus had with his Father. Made one in baptism, we go forth to live our faith in the world, eager for the unity that God intends for the whole human family.

### Prayer of the Day

O God of glory, your Son Jesus Christ suffered for us and ascended to your right hand. Unite us with Christ and each other in suffering and in joy, that all the world may be drawn into your bountiful presence, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

### First Reading: Acts 1:6-14

*Today's reading is part of the introduction to the narrative of the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost. These verses tell of the risen Lord's conversation with his disciples on the eve of his ascension, in which he promises that they will receive the power of the Holy Spirit.*

<sup>6</sup>When [the apostles] had come together, they asked [Jesus], "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup>He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." <sup>9</sup>When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup>While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup>They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

<sup>12</sup>Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

## Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35

<sup>1</sup>Let God arise, and let God's ene- | mies be scattered;  
let those who | hate God flee.

<sup>2</sup>**As smoke is driven away, so you should drive | them away;  
as the wax melts before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the pres- | ence of God.**

<sup>3</sup>But let the righteous be glad and rejoice | before God;  
let them also be mer- | ry and joyful.

<sup>4</sup>**Sing to God, sing praises to God's name; exalt the one who | rides the clouds;  
I AM is that name, rejoice | before God!**

<sup>5</sup>In your holy habita- | tion, O God,  
you are a father to orphans, defend- | er of widows;

<sup>6</sup>**you give the solitary a home and bring forth prisoners | into freedom;  
but the rebels shall live in | desert places.**

<sup>7</sup>O God, when you went forth be- | fore your people,  
when you marched | through the wilderness,

<sup>8</sup>**the earth quaked, and the skies poured down rain, at the presence of God, the | God  
of Sinai,  
at the presence of God, the | God of Israel.**

<sup>9</sup>You sent a bountiful | rain, O God;  
you restored your inheritance | when it languished.

<sup>10</sup>**Your people found their | home in it;  
in your goodness, O God, you have made provision | for the poor.**

<sup>32</sup>Sing to God, O kingdoms | of the earth;  
sing praises | to the Lord.

<sup>33</sup>**You ride in the heavens, O God, in the | ancient heavens;  
you send forth your voice, your | mighty voice.**

<sup>34</sup>Ascribe pow- | er to God,  
whose majesty is over Israel; whose strength is | in the skies.

<sup>35</sup>**How wonderful you are in your holy places, O | God of Israel,  
giving strength and power to your people! | Blessed be God!**

## Second Reading: 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11

*Our faith in Christ does not make us immune from the scorn of others. Nevertheless, we are to resist the designs of evil when we experience disparagement from others because we trust God's grace will strengthen and guide us.*

<sup>12</sup>Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup>But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.

<sup>14</sup>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.

<sup>5:6</sup>Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. <sup>7</sup>Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. <sup>8</sup>Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. <sup>9</sup>Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. <sup>10</sup>And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. <sup>11</sup>To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

## **Gospel: John 17:1-11**

*On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus prays to his heavenly Father, asking that those who continue his work in this world will live in unity.*

<sup>1</sup>After Jesus had spoken these words [to his disciples], he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, <sup>2</sup>since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. <sup>3</sup>And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. <sup>4</sup>I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup>So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

<sup>6</sup>“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. <sup>7</sup>Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. <sup>11</sup>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.”

## Prayers of Intercession

United in the hope and joy of the resurrection, let us pray for the church, the world, and all in need, saying “hear us, O God,” and responding, “your mercy is great.”

*A brief silence.*

God of harmony, as you drew your son to your side, you draw us to you and unite us with the planet and one another. Weave your church together in a web of mutual love for the sake of the world. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

As your Spirit hovered over the waters of creation, so your Spirit hovers over all that you have made. Bless the water that sustains the planet and grant wisdom to use it wisely. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You empower your people with the fire of your Spirit. Challenge activists and organizers, teachers and politicians, and all in leadership to speak a message of peace and justice. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You care for all your children. Show your steadfast love to those suffering isolation, especially exiles, refugees, or prisoners. Break the chains of all held fast by systemic oppression of any kind. Comfort all who are afraid or suffering from illness (*especially*). Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We give thanks that humankind serves as your body in the world, stewarding your abundant gifts. Guide this congregation’s leaders as they seek your will. We pray for our staff and council (*persons can be named*). Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You raise your saints to new life in Christ. We give you thanks for (*Helena and*) all your saints who have given us glimpses of your redeeming love. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Rejoicing in the victory of Christ’s resurrection, we lift our prayers and praise to you, almighty and eternal God; through Jesus Christ, our risen Lord.

**Amen.**

## ***A reflection for this Seventh Sunday of Easter...***

### Overhearing Jesus

At the ascension we, like the disciples in today's reading in Acts, are left looking at the sky. But in the High Priestly Prayer (John 17), Jesus brings us back to earth. In the prayer he speaks not only from the perspective of the risen and ascended one, but as the Word of God, now made flesh. The prayer anticipates the accomplishments of this Word, which does not return empty (Isa. 55:11), namely in the fulfillment of the "hour" of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. It is as if Jesus has already ascended "to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (John 20:17), and has returned to tell us something vital.

As we overhear Jesus, we learn that God's character and motive are identical to those of Jesus, who has now, fully and completely, "made God's name known." We no longer have to speculate about the nature of God. God's purposes and love are made known in Jesus. But we also learn about ourselves. Jesus' prayer frequently mentions the "world"—the world at once hostile to God and God's anointed, and yet also beloved of God (John 3:16). With Jesus' commissioning today we have our work to do, to make God known in and through Christ Jesus. The Living One works through us as "words within the world," who no longer seek meaning among the dead, but are empowered to make known the vibrant, new reality of Easter.

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