

## **Sunday, September 10, 2023 – Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

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### **Introduction**

Conflict is a part of relationships and life in community. Jesus' words in today's gospel are often used in situations having to do with church discipline. The prophet Ezekiel tells of warning the wicked to turn from their ways, and Paul reminds us that love is the fulfilling of the law. We gather in the name of Christ, assured that he is present among us with gifts of peace and reconciliation.

### **Prayer of the Day**

O Lord God, enliven and preserve your church with your perpetual mercy. Without your help, we mortals will fail; remove far from us everything that is harmful, and lead us toward all that gives life and salvation, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

### **First Reading: Exodus 12:1-14**

*Israel remembered its deliverance from slavery in Egypt by celebrating the festival of Passover. This festival featured the Passover lamb, whose blood was used as a sign to protect God's people from the threat of death. The early church described the Lord's supper using imagery from the Passover, especially in portraying Jesus as the lamb who delivers God's people from sin and death.*

<sup>1</sup>The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: <sup>2</sup>This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. <sup>3</sup>Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. <sup>4</sup>If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. <sup>5</sup>Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. <sup>6</sup>You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. <sup>7</sup>They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. <sup>8</sup>They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. <sup>9</sup>Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. <sup>10</sup>You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. <sup>11</sup>This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the LORD. <sup>12</sup>For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. <sup>13</sup>The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

<sup>14</sup>This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

### **Psalm: Psalm 149**

*Sing the LORD's praise in the assembly of the faithful. (Ps. 149:1)*

- <sup>1</sup>Hallelujah! Sing to the LORD<sup>1</sup> a new song,  
God's praise in the assembly<sup>1</sup> of the faithful.
- <sup>2</sup>**Let Israel rejoice<sup>1</sup> in their maker;**  
**let the children of Zion be joyful<sup>1</sup> in their ruler.**
- <sup>3</sup>Let them praise their maker's<sup>1</sup> name with dancing;  
let them sing praise with tambou-<sup>1</sup>rine and harp.
- <sup>4</sup>**For the LORD takes pleasure<sup>1</sup> in the people**  
**and adorns the<sup>1</sup> poor with victory. R**
- <sup>5</sup>Let the faithful re-<sup>1</sup>joice in triumph;  
let them sing for joy<sup>1</sup> on their beds.
- <sup>6</sup>**Let the praises of God be<sup>1</sup> in their throat**  
**and a two-edged sword<sup>1</sup> in their hand,**
- <sup>7</sup>to wreak vengeance<sup>1</sup> on the nations  
and punishment<sup>1</sup> on the peoples,
- <sup>8</sup>**to bind their<sup>1</sup> kings in chains**  
**and their nobles with<sup>1</sup> links of iron,**
- <sup>9</sup>to inflict on them the judg-<sup>1</sup>ment decreed;  
this is glory for all God's faithful ones.<sup>1</sup> Hallelujah! **R**

### **Second Reading: Romans 13:8-14**

*The obligation of Christians is to love one another and so fulfill the heart and goal of the law. Clothes make the person as we "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" and live today in light of the future God has in store for us.*

<sup>8</sup>Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup>The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>10</sup>Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

<sup>11</sup>Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; <sup>12</sup>the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; <sup>13</sup>let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. <sup>14</sup>Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

## **Gospel: Matthew 18:15-20**

*Jesus offers practical advice to his disciples on how individuals—and the church as a whole—should go about restoring relationships when one member has sinned against another.*

[Jesus said to the disciples:] <sup>15</sup>“If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. <sup>16</sup>But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup>If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. <sup>18</sup>Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. <sup>19</sup>Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup>For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

Prayers and introductions from  
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**Prayers of Intercession**

Remembering the caring and generous works of God, we pray for the church, creation, and the needs of our neighbors.

*A brief silence.*

Hold us accountable, O God. Show your church where repentance is needed and lead us in paths of intentional compassion and listening. Help us extend hands of reconciliation and care, especially in relationships with other Christians and people of other faiths. Merciful God,

**receive our prayer.**

Reveal your miracles to us, O God. Move us to cherish you as we behold the wonders of creation. Renew the seas and the soil, the forests and the creatures that live in them. Turn us to ways of living that seek Earth's thriving. Merciful God,

**receive our prayer.**

Inspire us to lead with honor, O God. Guide judges and legislators, police, and government officials to create and uphold just laws. Move us to treat all people with dignity and guide our conversations with one another. Merciful God,

**receive our prayer.**

Help us comfort those who suffer, O God. Reassure any who are harmed by the wicked acts of others. Bring peace to all who are vulnerable, frightened, despairing, or sick (*especially*). Guard their waking and their sleeping. Merciful God,

**receive our prayer.**

Awaken us, O God. Challenge and encourage your people to value the vocation to which each is called. We pray for all discerning new possibilities or changing employment (*especially*). In all our diverse callings, teach us to love our neighbor above all else. Merciful God,

**receive our prayer.**

*Here other intercessions may be offered.*

Be our hope, O God. We remember with thanksgiving your disciples who died in faith (*especially*). May their trust in your promise be our protection and our hope. Merciful God,

**receive our prayer.**

Remember us according to your steadfast love as we offer these and the prayers of our heart, trusting in your compassion made known through Jesus Christ.

**Amen.**

**A reflection for this Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

## Called to Community

Jesus says, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Matt. 18:20). In these Sundays after Pentecost, we are repeatedly reminded that God has not abandoned us and that Christ's resurrection and ascension are a beginning for us, not an end. The readings this week focus on the practical work of the gathered Christian community: turning from sin to repentance, from conflict to reconciliation. The question is as relevant today as it was for the disciples and the first Christians: how do we live together, work together, as the body of Christ? We have been saved by grace, liberated by God's love to love one another. What does it mean for us and for our community to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 13:14) and to clothe ourselves in love?

We keep asking these questions because the way we gather as Christians continues to be profoundly countercultural. We do not gather as a social club, drawn and kept together only by shared demographics and interests. If church is only a social club, there is no reason to continue to gather if conflict arises, if uncomfortable issues are raised, or if "the way it's always been" begins to change. If church is only a social club, there is no reason to do the hard work of reconciliation and forgiveness.

God calls us into community knowing that being in community is hard. In scripture we can find practical guidance for gathering through good and hard times. The Holy Spirit is always at work—in, through, and among us—to gather and regather us again. In community we meet and become Christ's body in ways that are impossible for us as individuals; all the commandments are fulfilled in this call to neighbor-love (Rom. 13:9).

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