

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Year B: Acts 1:15-17, 20a, 20c-26; Ps 103; 1 Jn 4:11-16; Jn 17:11b-19

May 16, 2021

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These days between the Ascension of the Lord and Pentecost invite us to consider what it must have been like for the Apostles and the first disciples of Christ, after He returned to Heaven and they waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

When Christ ascended into Heaven, the disciples were told that He would return someday. The angels who appeared at the Ascension said, "*Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven*" (Acts 1:11). But they weren't told, and they didn't know *when* He would return. They didn't know if it would be soon, in their lifetime, or perhaps over 2,000 years later, in *our* lifetime.

And they didn't know much about this Advocate, this Paraclete, that Jesus said He would send them from Heaven. Jesus had told them, "*I came from the Father and have come into the world. Now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father*" (Jn 16:28). "*But I tell you the truth, it is better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you*" (Jn 16:7). "*I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth*" (Jn 16:12-13).

So, as the disciples said goodbye to Christ and waited for this promised Advocate from Heaven, there was a lot they still didn't know. But, in spite of this uncertainty, the disciples knew what they had to do, even as they wondered what might happen next in God's dealing with the world. They knew they had to get started with the work Christ had given them. They knew that Christ was leaving the world, but they were still here in the world, with work to do. As we heard in the Gospel, Jesus prayed to His Father about the disciples, "*I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth*" (Jn 17:15-17). Jesus was leaving the world, but He was leaving His disciples in the world, to spread the Gospel and to help convert souls to the truth and the offer of eternal life. And they got started with this work, as we heard in the first reading, by replacing Judas, the betrayer, with St. Matthias, as one of the Twelve Apostles and witnesses to the Resurrection of Christ.

This is a good reminder to all of us. Over 2,000 years later, the Church is still waiting for Christ to return, we know not when. But until then, we have work to do. There might be much that we don't know about, like what will happen next in the Church, or in the world, or even in our own lives, but we know what we need to do, as disciples of Christ. In every age, in every time of history, Christians have their work cut out for them, and that is to be consecrated and faithful to the truth that Christ taught us, even if that truth is no longer popular or accepted in the world. As Jesus said in the Gospel, *"I gave them your word, and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world"* (Jn 17:14). The duty for Christians in every age is to live according to the Gospel teaching of Christ and to share that teaching with others – to be witnesses of the Gospel truth to the world.

This work starts, of course, with our own conversion to the truth. We won't convince others to live the Gospel, if we don't live it ourselves. And, in an age and a culture that is saturated with impurity, this work starts with our own purification and commitment to purity of heart. We need to purify our minds and hearts and our desires, if we are to sanctify our lives and help others convert to Christ. And, then we need to show the charity of Christ to others, beginning with those most in need for whom Our Lord showed great compassion. This includes those who are poor or ill, the elderly who are lonely and afraid, and any victims of tragedy or abuse or injustice or addiction. These are the people – those who find life difficult and painful – who most need the charity and compassion of Christ, and He relies on us to show it to them.

In every age, there's the risk that Christians can be distracted by events in the world or the Church, and might forget about the great work that needs to be done. The work of the Church, of us who are still here in the world, starts with our conversion to Christ and our consecration to the truth He taught us, and then the spreading of this truth to those most in need. Jesus told His Father, *"I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth"* (Jn 17:15-17).

May St. Julie's Parish always be a place and a community of disciples, where souls seek ever deeper conversion to Christ and a fervent commitment to the truth of the Gospel, until Our Lord finally returns to the world that He redeemed.