

THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER – A

The gospel reading continues from the words of Jesus speaking about his departure from this world. He tells the disciples. 'I will not leave you orphans I will come back to you.' Jesus promises, 'I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever.' Through the Spirit Jesus will be present in his Church until the end of time. In the first reading we hear how the Samaritans received the word of God and in the second reading Peter teaches we must have hope which will enable us to endure suffering following Christ's example.

The **First Reading** is from Acts of the Apostles. This New Testament book is part two of a history of the rise of Christianity, the first part being the gospel according to Luke. They became separated when, about 150 A.D., Christians wanted the four gospel accounts bound together in one volume. The author, Luke, is a Syrian from Antioch, a doctor of non-Jewish origin, who was a close friend of Paul accompanying him on his second and third missionary journeys. Luke collected a great deal of evidence from a variety of sources which he edited. The book deals with the primitive Jerusalem community under Peter's leadership, the spread of Christianity to Samaria, to the gentile peoples and the early days of Christianity in Antioch. From chapter 13 Luke deals with Paul's three missionary journeys and ends with Paul a prisoner in Rome.

The reading, 8.5-8,14-17, reveals how the Word of God reached the Samaritans. They were disliked by the Jews who attributed their origin to the importation of five gentile peoples who retained some of their loyalty to their old gods. Jesus did not reject the Samaritans and told his disciples to be witnesses of his resurrection 'not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and Samaria.' Following Stephen's martyrdom 'a bitter persecution started against the Church in Jerusalem' and along with many others the apostle Philip escaped to Samaria and this enables the Lord's command to be fulfilled. Philip 'proclaimed the Christ to them' and it should be remembered that the Samaritans expected the Messiah as the woman at the well told Jesus (John 4.25). Philip's preaching is accompanied by the signs of the Spirit. The reading omits the story about Simon the Magician but goes on to report that two senior apostles, Peter and John, go down to Samaria to confirm the Samaritans in their faith and they receive the Holy Spirit. We rejoice today as more and more people come to accept the apostolic teaching.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 65.1-7,16,20, is a cry of joy to God for his wonderful deeds on account of which all peoples of the earth must bow down before God. The psalmist then recalls the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea, a further cause of joy. Finally he entreats all God-fearers to listen: 'Blessed be God, who did not reject my prayer nor withhold his love from me,' a psalm of faith and hope and love of God.

The **Second Reading** is from the first letter of St Peter. This is one of the 'universal' letters or Catholic Epistles which are addressed to the whole Church rather than to one particular community like the Pauline letters. The letter is attributed to Peter because his name is mentioned in the opening verse of the letter but his authorship is still unproven. He writes from Rome (Babylon 5.13) to the churches of Asia Minor (Turkey). The purpose of the letter is to help its readers' faith in time of trial Christians must suffer patiently like Christ in time of trial. The letter is also a valuable summary of apostolic theology.

The reading, 3.15-18, teaches that while we must have reverence for 'the Lord Christ in our hearts' we must know the reason for our hope in Jesus and explain our reason with courtesy. If this is not enough we must be prepared to recognise it is the will of God that we should suffer, in so doing we are imitators of Christ who in his innocence suffered for us to lead us to God. While we are celebrating the resurrection we cannot forget that the resurrection was achieved only at the cost of suffering even unto death.