

## THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER – C

On this fifth Sunday as we approach the feast of the Ascension we have the gospel reading when Jesus tells his disciples that he is not going to be with them much longer. The scene is the Supper table and Judas has just left and the evangelist notes, 'It was night,' the darkness of sin. It is in this night of sin that 'the Son of Man has been glorified' and part of Jesus' glorification is his departure from this earth because he has finished all the Father commanded him to do. 'It is finished' said Jesus from the Cross and he died. The reading from Acts gives a brief account of Paul's return journey to Antioch and the second reading from the end of the book of Revelation recounts John's vision of the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

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.

Today's reading is from 14.21-27. In last week's reading we heard about Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey and we left them heading for Iconium. There after a similar pattern of preaching, conversion and rejection they went on to Lycaonia and the town of Lystra. Here Paul cured a man and they were thought to be gods in human form. Paul quickly rejected this notion and then disgruntled Jews from Antioch in Pisidia arrived and Paul was stoned outside the city. His disciples came and next day he went on to Derbe and preached there. Paul and Barnabas then left Derbe and here our reading begins. Paul gradually makes his way back through all the towns he has visited encouraging the disciples and crossing the sea Paul and Barnabas arrive back in Antioch and report to the Church there. The Church grows.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 144.8-13, is an alphabetical psalm in praise of Yahweh the King. The praise is general but in verse two we can see the words applied to Paul and his speaking of the glory of God's reign and making known God's mighty deeds. The words of the last verse, the everlasting kingdom and rule of God, lead us into the thoughts of the second reading where we hear of the heavenly Jerusalem.

The **Book of the Apocalypse** (Greek) or **Revelation** (English) is a revelation of hidden things, particularly of hidden events in the future. The authors of apocalyptic writings may be considered the successors of the prophets; they heard the Word of God and passed it on by word of mouth, whereas apocalyptic writers were given revelation in a dream and passed it on in writing. The language of this writing is richly symbolic and the importance of the visions which are described is never in their immediate literal meaning. The imagery must be appreciated at its true value and we must do our best to translate the symbols back into the ideas which the author intended them to convey. This type of writing became very popular in the two centuries before Christ, the visions of Ezekiel and Zechariah paving the way, and was fully developed by 165 BC when the prophet Daniel was written. The authorship was attributed to John, the apostle, by writers in the West, while those in the East did not hold this view. The book is dated about 95 AD with parts written at the end of the sixties AD. The book is first and foremost a tract for the times, a period of disturbance and bitter persecution, to increase the hope and determination of the infant Church. This hope is based on the belief in the great 'Day of Yahweh' spoken of by the prophet Amos 5.18. The 'Day' is coming soon when God will liberate his people from their oppressors. When John wrote the Church had been decimated by persecution, Rome and its empire (The Beast) was only a tool wielded by Satan. The book portrays the basic realities on which faith relies in any period of history; God's promise to be with his people. It is this presence that has now been perfected by the marriage of God and his new chosen people in the person of his Son, Immanuel (God-with-us). The promise of the risen Christ, 'I am with you always; yes, to the end of time,' is what gives life to the Church.

The second reading, 21.1-5, is in the words of John Paul II a 'magnificent description of the City of God, the author of Revelation indicates the definitive defeat of evil and the achievement of perfect communion between God and man.' This is the final chapter of the book and the words of the writer need to be ever present in our minds to give our actions, our endeavours indeed the whole of our lives direction and purpose. This is what the author promises for those who suffer persecution and his words are equally important for us because our world would have us believe temporary joy and happiness that can be seen to be achievable is more real than promises made for life after death; an important reading.