

7th Sunday of Easter - B

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Acts 1:15-17, 20-26

Today we hear of one of the first acts that the Apostles undertake under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This event takes place in the upper room, where the apostles and Jesus' disciples have taken refuge after the Ascension. Jesus had commanded them (Acts 1:4-5) *"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."*

¹⁵ Peter stood up in the midst of the brothers

Peter is the leader of the Apostles, the one on whom Jesus promised to build His Church. Peter now exercises his authority.

(there was a group of about one hundred and twenty persons

The number 120 is not an accidental number, the Mishna (a collection of rabbinical opinions) says that any community's officers will number one-tenth of its numerical strength. To have twelve apostles (bishops), there must be 120 to represent

in the one place).

The gathering connotes the unity which the bishops are to represent.

He said, ¹⁶ "My brothers,

The assembly's character of brotherhood is reinforced. If they are in covenant with God and Jesus is their eldest brother, then they are all brothers (brethren).

the scripture had to be fulfilled which the holy Spirit spoke beforehand through the mouth of David, concerning Judas, who was the guide for those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷ He was numbered among us and was allotted a share in this ministry. ^{20a} For it is written in the Book of Psalms:

Part of verse 20 is omitted in this reading. The omitted portion says *"Let his encampment become desolate, and may no one dwell in it"* which is a quotation from Psalm 69:25 (Psalm 69:26 in the New American Bible). This quotation is in the Septuagint (Greek) rendering rather than in the Hebrew.

^{20c} 'May another take his office.'

This is a quotation from Psalm 109:8. The King James Version renders this passage "His bishopric let another take." Peter, in citing these Old Testament verses, is declaring the doctrine of apostolic

succession; a doctrine still adhered to today in the Church.

²¹ Therefore, it is necessary that one of the men who accompanied us the whole time the Lord Jesus came and went among us, ²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day on which he was taken up from us,

Peter now proceeds to establish the prerequisite for the office: prior service.

become with us

Actually, the Greek is much more forceful, it says “must be named.”

a witness to his resurrection."

This is the function of an apostle, to bear witness. The term “martyr” means “witness” and all the apostles except Saint John were martyred for the faith.

²³ So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias.

Nothing is known about the candidates except what we know right here. For some unknown reason Matthias’ name was especially honored in Gnostic circles in ancient Egypt. A number of apocryphal writings have been attributed to him. With all the additional information given about Joseph, one might have expected that he was the one to be chosen.

²⁴ Then they prayed, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take the place in this apostolic ministry from which Judas turned away to go to his own place." ²⁶ Then they gave lots to them, and the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was counted with the eleven apostles

Who says gambling is always sinful? This was the traditional Hebrew method of choosing. Rather than casting votes and electing, they draw lots and allow God to do the choosing (Leviticus 167-10); Numbers 26:55-56; 1 Samuel 14:41-42).

2nd Reading - 1 John 4:11-16

On the fifth Sunday of Easter we heard Jesus’ divine commandment: We are to believe in the name of God’s son, Jesus Christ and we are to love one another. Last week we heard John begin to expand on the second part of this commandment – brotherly love. He taught that God is love and it was He who loved us to begin with. Today we hear that brotherly love is the response which God’s love calls for.

¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another.

The obligation for Christians to love one another follows from the divine love God has for us.

¹² No one has ever seen God.

A general rule that John's writing employs is that only Jesus reveals the Father. After all, Exodus 33:20 says "*you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live.*"

Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us.

God's love reaches perfection when God lives in us as we keep His command to love. We can't see God directly, but we see Him in those who love us.

¹³ This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us, that he has given us of his Spirit.

The gift of the Spirit is evidence of God's indwelling.

¹⁴ Moreover, we have seen and testify that the Father sent his Son as savior of the world. ¹⁵ Whoever acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in him and he in God.

To the proof of divine life in the presence of the Holy Spirit, which is a testimony of faith, another testimony of faith must be joined – the acceptance of Jesus in His true character as "Savior of the world."

¹⁶ We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God

If you remain in God, you abide in Him.

and God in him.

Without the reality of the Christ-event as the exemplification of the divine love, love of brethren is meaningless; joined to this reality, it truly shows forth the divine presence in man.

Gospel - John 17:11-19

John 17:1-26 was termed "The High-Priestly Prayer" by the sixteenth century Lutheran theologian David Chytraeus although equivalent expressions were used by some of the Church fathers. The name is appropriate for it is Christ's prayer consecrating His body and blood for the sacrifice in which they are about to be offered, and His benediction over the Church that He is to bring forth in His glorification. In the first part of His prayer, Jesus prays for himself and in the last part He prays for all believers. What we hear today is from the middle part where He prays for His disciples. This prayer takes place in the upper room during the Last Supper. Immediately after this prayer Jesus and the eleven (Judas having left to betray Him) go to Gethsemane for the Agony in the Garden.

¹¹ And now I will no longer be in the world, but they are in the world, while I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me,

Jesus had been able to protect the disciples “in the name” of God when He was with them but He is soon to leave. This is a prayer of perseverance.

so that they may be one just as we are.

The unity of the Father and the Son is the model and principle of the unity of the disciples, since the “name” that Christ has revealed is nothing less than the divine life itself. The bishops are to be one in unity.

¹² When I was with them I protected them in your name that you gave me, and I guarded them, and none of them was lost

None fell away from discipleship; unity was maintained.

except the son of destruction, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

See Psalm 41:9 (Psalm 41:10 in the New American Bible). Jesus knew in advance but it was up to Judas’ choice and use of his free will.

¹³ But now I am coming to you. I speak this in the world so that they may share my joy completely. ¹⁴ I gave them your word,

The disciples have the “word of God,” the *logos* (name, truth) from Jesus and are “not of the world.” The process of entering into covenant for the Jew was to be gathered into the unity, separated from outsiders. Jesus draws on this imagery and belief in calling the apostles to unity.

and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. ¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one.

The destiny of the Church is to live in the world but not to be of the world, to affect the world but not to be affected by it.

¹⁶ They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world.

The world is described as men enslaved to sin and the devil.

¹⁷ Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth.

Old Testament priests were consecrated, set aside, made holy. The apostles and those who derive their authority from them (bishops, priests, deacons) are also consecrated, but in a far more personal and intimate way – they are consecrated in truth. Jeremiah 1:5 says that the consecrated are to be perfect. The Word of God itself is the consecration of the disciples.

¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world.

The apostolic mission of the Church is the same as Christ's mission from the Father; therefore the consecration is the same. The actual mission of the disciples is not revealed in this gospel account until 20:21ff ("As the Father sent Me, so I send you . . .") but the perspective of the prayer sees the future as an accomplished fact.

¹⁹ And I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth.

Through His voluntary sacrifice. This sacrifice is the beginning of the glorification by which the disciples are consecrated.