

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

cf. John 14:18

R⁷. Alleluia, alleluia.

I will not leave you orphans, says the Lord.
I will come back to you, and your hearts will
rejoice.

R⁷. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

John 17:11b-19; L60B

Lifting up his eyes to heaven,
Jesus prayed, saying:

“Holy Father, keep them
in your name that you
have given me,
so that they may be one
just as we are one.

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

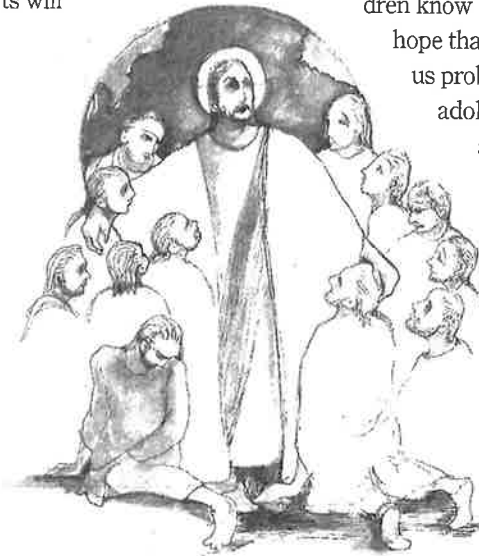
But now I am coming to you.

I speak this in the world
so that they may share my joy
completely.

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.
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.

As you sent me into the world,
so I sent them into the world.
And I consecrate myself for them,
so that they also may be consecrated
in truth.”



Reflecting on the Gospel

Do you remember the first time you received the keys to the car? That might have been as a teenager. Or do you recall giving a set of car keys to your teenage child for the first time? What trepidation! But what pride and joy as well. Receiving the keys to the car marks a milestone. One is no longer a child but not quite an adult. The awesome responsibility of driving a car might be missed by some and embraced by others. As parents we want to ensure that our children know the obligations that accompany driving. We hope beyond hope that nothing bad happens, that there is no accident. Each of us probably gave a stern yet encouraging talk to these budding adolescents who were yearning only to get behind the wheel and go! And ultimately, we hand over the keys to the car while hoping and praying that all are safe from harm.

In today's gospel Jesus is praying a final prayer to the Father prior to his own arrest and ultimate crucifixion. What must have been going through his mind at that time? He was definitely concerned for his friends, those whom the Father had given and entrusted to Jesus. He prays for them, not that they be taken out of the world, but that they are kept from evil, safe from harm, while living in it. Jesus protected his friends while he was with them, but he will be with them no longer. He will not be able to keep them from evil, or even keep them safe. They are being sent into the world as Jesus was sent. Almost as a con-

cerned parent, Jesus makes his prayer to the Father.

Jesus' desire for his friends is that they may share his joy completely. We too are those who are the objects of this prayer. We are Jesus' friends and he wants our joy to be complete. He knows that the world is a tough, sometimes violent place. He will lose his life in a contest with violence. And yet, he does not take us out of the world. He gives us the ability to live in it, while asking the Father to keep us from the evil one. Moreover, he consecrates himself to us. As we are his followers, indeed his very friends, we are consecrated in truth. This final prayer and petition tells us a great deal about Jesus, his relationship with the Father, and his relationship with us. How fortunate we are to have him as our advocate.

Living the Paschal Mystery

It can be difficult to say good-bye. Relationships, friendships, and bonds of love enter a new phase when we say good-bye. We may never see our loved ones again, or in the same way. People will develop, grow, and change. And we give them the freedom to do so. Jesus gives us this same freedom today. He knows he is returning to the Father, leaving those who were entrusted to him on their own. Yet, he will promise (in another reading) to send another advocate, the Spirit. But as for Jesus, he will no longer be with them, his friends. If dying on the cross were not enough, Jesus also knew that he was letting go of friendships. He knew the end was in store, and so he placed these relationships in prayer with the Father.

This can be a model for us as we enter new phases of relationships, or when we say good-bye to those we love. At some point we turn it over to the Father, entrusting them and the relationship to his care. Though the relationship may be buffeted by storms, in the meantime it is Jesus' prayer and our own that we will be safe, and the relationships will be secure and last the test of time. Giv-

ing over this trust to the Father can be an exercise in humility, knowing that we are not in control. When we turn over control like this, it can seem that we are dying to our own wishes and desires. But in letting go, we are giving new life.

Focusing the Gospel

John 17:11b-19

In John’s account of the Last Supper, after Jesus’ final teachings to his disciples before his passion, he addresses his Father in prayer. Today’s gospel is from chapter 17 of John’s gospel, where Jesus prays for his disciples and the mission before them and commends them to God’s protection. Jesus prays that they may persevere despite the world’s “hatred” of them for they are not of the world. He prays that they may share the “joy” of Jesus completely and “be consecrated in [the] truth.”

Focusing the First Reading

Acts 1:15-17, 20a, 20c-26

After Jesus’ ascension, the eleven apostles return to Jerusalem. Peter calls upon the community, which Luke numbers at about 120 (no doubt including women as Acts 1:14, the verse immediately prior to what is proclaimed today, indicates), to restore the number of apostles to the sacred biblical number of twelve (see Luke 22:29-30) that Jesus himself had established during his earthly ministry. Nominating two of the company—Barsabbas and Matthias—to serve with the eleven as “witness[es] to his resurrection,” they prayerfully place the final selection in the hands of God.

Though it may seem odd to us, drawing lots was a common biblical process of election between equal or like things (for example, the distribution of the land of Canaan among the tribes of Israel [Num 26:55]; Zechariah’s designation to offer incense in the temple sanctuary [Luke 1:9]). The use of lots was considered an act of faith in God’s judgment instead of subjecting important decisions to the vagaries of human manipulation or prejudice. Of course, we do not use this process of decision making today!

To the reader/hearer of antiquity, what is important in this story is not how Matthias is chosen but that the number of apostles is restored to twelve as Jesus had intended. These twelve will preach to assembled Israel (the people of the twelve tribes) on the feast of Pentecost. After that point, for example, when James is martyred, there is no further effort to reconstitute the twelve apostles. The purpose of the reconstituted twelve has been accomplished on Pentecost.

Focusing the Responsorial Psalm

Ps 103:1-2, 11-12, 19-20 (19a)

The verses from Psalm 103 that make up today’s responsorial psalm are a hymn of thanksgiving for God’s constant mercy and his care of the poor and humble. Today’s psalm takes up Ascension Thursday’s theme of the Lord’s universal sovereignty. The Hebrew word translated here as “soul” (*nephesh*) might be more accurately translated as “life” or “living being”: the use of the word “soul” in the psalm is a call to give praise to God with the very being that propels and animates our lives.

Focusing the Second Reading

1 John 4:11-16

The final selection for this Easter season from the First Letter of John celebrates the Spirit of God’s love that binds us to God and to one another. “No one has ever seen God,” but God remains in us in our love for one another.

PROMPTS FOR HOMILISTS, CATECHISTS, AND RCIA TEAMS

Have you ever paid a price for the sake of the “truth”? Have you known or do you know someone who has paid dearly for “proclaiming” the “truth”? Have you ever been “hated” for taking a position or acting in a way contrary to expectations?

Why are institutions, businesses, and societies suspicious or wary of the “truth” proclaimed in the Gospel?

Have you ever experienced God “remaining” with you when you have most struggled to love?

In what ways do you “not belong to the world”?