

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 13, 2018

First Reading – Acts 1:15-17, 20a, 20c-26

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 103

Second Reading – 1 John 4:11-16

Gospel – John 17:11b-19

My dear people of God:

On this seventh Sunday of Easter, allow me to guide your hearts into realizing that we are so special in the heart of God, so much so, that He has set into motion His divine plans prior to the Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus. The Holy Spirit confirmed and affirmed all that Jesus did and taught. We were in the heart of God long before we were even created. Our salvation has always been His foremost pre-occupation.

Let us see where we all fit into the plan of God by meditating on the readings. Today's first reading talks about the election of Matthias as the God-chosen successor of Judas Iscariot.

Verse 15 of the very first chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles does not give us the reason why the group of believers, about 120 of them, had a meeting. At that meeting, we are told that they had to elect the successor of Judas Iscariot.

It is interesting to note that this meeting happened a few days after we were told in verse 14, that the apostles frequently prayed as a group together with some women and with Mary, the mother of Jesus. Luke, the author of this part of the Acts of the Apostles did not give us any explanation, but we could guess that there must have been a debate on who should fill the space vacated by one who was also their constant companion in the past when Jesus was still physically with them.

Their only recourse was prayer. Luke, who wrote this part of the Acts of the Apostles clearly tells us that they "continued together in prayer," stressing

their continuous action. How long did they pray? How long were they able to pray with one mind? We do not know because we were not given this information. But what we do know is that at some point in their prayer in the midst of their waiting, an inspiration came to Peter. They invoked the Lord's guidance. They cast lots and the lot fell upon Matthias.

Brothers and sisters, please be certain of this. We find in today's election of Matthias an answer to a question that remains unspoken: What are we to make of the fact that Jesus handpicked Judas to be His disciple and to carry His authority into the world toward a restored Israel, in light of the reality that this same Judas betrayed Jesus to His death? Moreover, now we only have eleven. How can we resume the *symbolic unity of Israel* without twelve?

My dear people of God, we must not overlook the significance of this election of Matthias. This enhanced the faith of the disciples and early believers, that 'another should take the office left vacant' by Judas, as Scriptures had foretold thru David, and that Jesus really belonged to the Davidic line.

Peter wove some credible reasoning from Scripture that the drama precipitated by Judas's infidelity was a necessary component in God's design. It had to be fulfilled! If we ask the question: Why was it necessary for the apostles to select a replacement for Judas?

The answer is simple: God's plan was not simply to restore Israel, but the entire creation. We have to understand that prior to the descent of the Holy Spirit, the community of believers was inwardly focused and was basically homogeneous. The coming of the Holy Spirit shifted their focus, revealing how big Jesus' vision really was. God is not concerned with the restoration of Israel apart from the restoration of all of creation; rather, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Israel is empowered to capture the fullness of its election and mission to the world. And now, we are part of that missionary people, evangelized and evangelizing.

Let us now go to the Second Reading.

The apostle John beautifully declared: If then, my dearest children, God loved us even when we were His enemies, to the extent of delivering up His

Son for us; we ought, in imitation of Him, to love one another, not even excepting our enemies.

If we love one another, God will abide in us - that is, if we make to one another a return of the love which we owe, and of which we cannot, in this life, make a return, to the invisible God.

And His charity, or the charity we owe Him, “is perfected in us” because, unless we loved our neighbor, our love would be imperfect, and would not fully extend to all the objects contemplated by the precepts of charity. By loving our neighbor, we perfect the love of God; for, by loving our neighbor supernaturally, we wish for him the greatest spiritual goods; and hence, we wish him to enjoy the knowledge and love of God, the greatest of spiritual advantages; and we, thereby, wish that God would be loved and known by His creatures.

We know that we abide in God by the close union of charity and love, and He in us, by sanctifying grace, by the abundance of spiritual gifts which He has poured forth on the Church to which we belong.

“And we have seen and do testify that the Father hath sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.” The Apostle John declared that he, the rest of the apostles, and the rest of the early believers have seen it with their own eyes and bear testimony to the fact that God the Father hath sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. This has reference to an earlier verse, which is actually verse 9. John here proves what might be questioned, regarding God’s sending His Son to save the world, from the very evidence of the senses on the part of the Apostles themselves. The words, “we have seen,” are the same as those of 1 John 1:1-2. He insists on this point particularly, because it is the basis and foundation of all Christian faith and charity.

And now, the Gospel: Today's Gospel once again places us in the upper room on the evening before Jesus died. Judas has left the dinner table and is on his way to the authorities in order to get the band of soldiers that he will lead to Gethsemane in order to arrest Jesus. Jesus has finished His discourse with His disciples in the upper room. He is almost ready to go to Gethsemane where He will be arrested.

Jesus, knowing that His disciples were about to experience three of the scariest and loneliest days of their lives, has one last thing to do before they

leave for Gethsemane. He prayed to the Father on their behalf and He made His disciples hear His prayer for them. We call this prayer the Priestly Prayer of Jesus. We all heard a part of that prayer in today's Gospel. This prayer teaches us much about Jesus' attitude towards His disciples. This is the evening before His death on the cross and He knew it. He is concerned about His followers.

Later on, in Gethsemane, He will pray for Himself, but there in the upper room, just before they leave for Gethsemane, He prayed for those who will feel so alone and so frightened during the coming days - the days of His sorrow, suffering, and death.

Jesus has a different teaching. In His prayer, He prayed, *"The world has hated them because they are not of the world."* There is sin in the world. Whether we are citizens of this world or citizens of heaven, we will commit sin while we live in this world. We are in the world, but not of the world. But we know that the Holy Spirit works in us so that we place our trust in Jesus Christ. And a new way opens before us. Our citizenship is no longer in this world. Instead, it is in heaven. We live in this world as aliens. When the forces of evil overwhelm us and we sin, we have an ambassador with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

Jesus prays for us. In His Priestly Prayer He prayed that the FATHER, WHO IS HOLY, will keep us in His NAME. In this way, we will have, by grace, the unity that the Father and the Son have by nature. As we look at the words that Jesus used: HOLY, FATHER, and NAME, we see that Jesus' prayer is a variation of the beginning of the prayer He taught us: "Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name." As we listen to Jesus' prayer, we learn that the closer we are to the Father, the closer we are to each other. When the Father keeps us in His NAME, then we are one in Him.

How did Jesus keep us in the Father's NAME? His prayer tells us that as well. He prayed to the Father, "I have given them your word." Jesus kept them in the Father's NAME by teaching them the Father's Word.

Jesus, our great High Priest, loves us so much. When any normal person would be concerned for his own upcoming suffering and death, Jesus was praying for us. He was praying that we would remain in the Holy Father's NAME by the power of His Word. He was about to embrace the cross, so that

we would be in this world, but not of the world, and He prayed to His Father to keep us that way.

My dear people of God, allow me to go back to what I said in the beginning. We are so special in the heart of Jesu. He wants to keep us in His Father's NAME. We are protected by that genuinely authoritative NAME. As we get nearer to the Feast of Pentecost, we will realize how much power and authority we do have if only we hold as HOLY God's NAME, and continually profess that NAME, too, in our actions and in our dealings with each other. Amen