

May 17, 2020: Sixth Sunday of Easter: Year A

First Reading: Acts 8.5-8, 14-17

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 66.1-3a, 4-5, 6-7a, 16+20 (R. 1)

Second Reading: 1 Peter 3.15-18

Gospel: John 14.15-21

Homily by Fr. Robert Weaver

“Hey you! Go back to where you came from!” “Look at you with your funny-looking facemask; you’re what’s wrong with our culture.”

“Because of you people, the whole world is under lockdown. Thanks a lot!” (See: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/richmond-bc-clara-kan-racism-covid-19-1.5565451>.)

Recently, the media has been reporting that this is the sort of prejudicial language some people have used in the past while as they have blamed others for the current COVID-19 pandemic we are facing.

Unfortunately, prejudice and racism flow from our fallen nature and they have been around for a long time – including when Jesus of Nazareth lived on earth. For instance, many Jewish people in Jesus’ time resented the Samaritans, the nearby people of Samaria, because they were descendants of Jews who had mixed with people from a different ethnic and religious background. And because of their different background and customs, many Jews “looked down” on the Samaritans.

Consequently, there was definitely some “bad blood” between these two peoples (see: <https://www.cristoreystmartin.org/sahleys-good-samaritan-difference-prejudice-acceptance-and-love/>).

Now, despite these tensions, we hear in our 1st reading today, taken from Acts 8, that Philip the deacon went to Samaria to proclaim that the Lord Jesus has risen from the dead. Through the Holy Name of Jesus Philip did some wonderful things there - such as casting out evil spirits, healing people, and bringing them true joy. And though we do not hear this today, Acts 8 also tells us that Philip baptized both men and women in Samaria, including a man named Simon who used to practice magic.

We also hear today that when the Apostles in Jerusalem were told that the people of Samaria had accepted the word of God, Peter and John went to this region. The two Apostles prayed for the Samaritans, and then they laid their hands on them.

Let's now consider a couple of things about today's 1st reading. For one, Philip's ministry in Samaria displayed the power of Jesus Christ to heal divisions between people as many of the Samaritans accepted Philip's message and came to him for Baptism. This happened in spite of the ethnic and religious tensions between Jews and Samaritans that went back several centuries (see Ignatius Catholic Study Bible, p. 220).

Second, just as we received wonderful insights a couple of weeks ago about infant baptism when we heard Peter (Acts 2) telling all of his listeners to get baptized, including their children, today we receive wonderful insights about the Sacrament of Confirmation. As we hear, Philip the deacon proclaimed the Good News and baptized the people but when it came to the rite of laying hands on others this was something that only Peter and John, as apostles, were authorized to do.

So, this passage is very meaningful for us because it is essentially the first account of the Sacrament of Confirmation in the ancient Church and it speaks to the authority Jesus gave to his Apostles to lay hands on others. When the apostles laid their hands on the people, they received an outpouring of the Holy Spirit which completed their Baptism and they were sent out as missionaries (see Pitre, MRE).

It is truly fitting that the Apostles alone were given this authority to complete Baptisms and send others out as missionaries since they themselves were sent out by Our Lord to make disciples.

And this apostolic authority to administer the sacrament of Confirmation has passed on to their successors, who are bishops (see Pitre, MRE).

Indeed, today's Catholic bishops are successors to the apostles. This means that our bishops, Ronald Fabbro and Joseph Dabrowski, are, sacramentally speaking, descendants of the original Apostles.

Now, any time we talk about the power of the sacraments, including the sacrament of Confirmation, we are talking about the power of the Holy Spirit. As we hear in Acts today, when Peter and John laid their hands on the Samaritans, "...they received the Holy Spirit." Likewise, in our Gospel reading today (John 14) Jesus also talks about the Holy Spirit. Jesus tells the disciples that they know the Holy Spirit because he abides with them and that he will be **in them**.

Think of this, the Holy Spirit is not only with us...but he is **in us**. This is amazing! And then Jesus goes on to talk about himself, as he says "that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." So, not only is the Holy Spirit **in us** but so is Jesus Christ! When Jesus talks about himself as well as the Father and the Holy Spirit today, he is giving us a glimpse into the central mystery of our Catholic-Christian lives – the Most Holy Trinity, the Divine Truth that there is one God who is three Persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (see Catechism of the Catholic Church, 234).

As a mystery, there is certainly an element of faith that comes with our belief in the Trinity. And yet we can still use our God-given minds to partially grasp this eternal truth. One insight about the Trinity that I discovered a few years ago is based on God's infinite charity - his pure, unselfish love.

If we were to think about God as being only two Persons – the Father and the Son, then the love between the two of them would be narrowly exclusive, an "I have you all to myself sort of thing." In this picture, the Father loves the Son supremely as does the Son love the Father but it is limited to these two only, it does not go beyond them.

But when we consider the presence of another Person, the Holy Spirit, then we better understand God's perfectly open and unselfish charity. This is because the **Father** delights in the love between the **Son** and the **Holy Spirit**, the **Son** delights in the love between the **Holy Spirit** and the **Father**, and the **Holy Spirit** delights in the love between the **Father** and the **Son**. So, as one God who is three Persons, it is evident that God is infinitely generous – He is a Divine Family! (See:

[https://www.hprweb.com/2014/01/toward-a-theology-of-infertility-the-trinity-in-richard-of-st-victor/.](https://www.hprweb.com/2014/01/toward-a-theology-of-infertility-the-trinity-in-richard-of-st-victor/))

And as Jesus so beautifully points out in today's Gospel, this one God who is three Persons is **in us**. And this means that we are **in Him**. By virtue of our Baptism we enter into the Divine Family and our activity and role within this Family grows and develops through prayer, works of charity, fasting, and through receiving the sacraments, including Confirmation.

I mentioned before that some prejudicial tensions have surfaced during this pandemic and for this we need to pray. And another big issue is loneliness, as a lot of people are feeling very isolated and lonely these days (see: <https://globalnews.ca/news/6793214/coronavirus-canada-lonely/>).

Of course, loneliness was a problem before the pandemic and it will likely still be a problem when the pandemic eases. And yet it is vital that we realize that we are never, ever alone. We belong to God, the Divine Family, and whenever we start to feel lonely then we should prayerfully recall that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are together **in us as one God** and we are **in Him**.

When we recognize how closely united we are to our infinitely generous and loving God then we are filled with a sense of peace, joy, and purpose that no human being or activity can ever provide. As Jesus says today, "I will not leave you orphaned" and indeed we are never orphaned, we are never alone, for God is **in us** and we are **in Him**. And for this let us give thanks and proclaim with our whole selves: Blessed be God, and Blessed be his Holy Name!