

Sunday 24 May 2020 Seventh Sunday of Easter

COLLECT O God the King of glory, you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven: we beseech you, leave us not comfortless, but send your Holy Spirit to strengthen us and exalt us to the place where our Saviour Christ is gone before, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

FIRST READING. Acts 1:6-14. When the apostles had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

Or Ezekiel 36:24-28

PSALM 68:1-10. 32-end (or 68:1-10) **R** Sing to God, sing praises to his name. Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered; let those that hate him flee before him. As the smoke vanishes, so may they vanish away; as wax melts at the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God. **R** But let the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; let them make merry with gladness. Sing to God, sing praises to his name; exalt him who rides on the clouds. The Lord is his name; rejoice before him. **R** Father of the fatherless, defender of widows, God in his holy habitation! God gives the solitary a home and brings forth prisoners to songs of welcome, but the rebellious inhabit a burning desert. **R** O God, when you went forth before your people, when you marched through the wilderness, The earth shook and the heavens dropped down rain, at the presence of God, the Lord of Sinai, at the presence of God, the God of Israel. **R** You sent down a gracious rain, O God; you refreshed your inheritance when it was weary. Your people came to dwell there; in your goodness, O God, you provide for the poor. **R** Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth; make music in praise of the Lord; He rides on the ancient heaven of heavens and sends forth his voice, a mighty voice. **R** Ascribe power to God, whose splendour is over Israel, whose power is above the clouds. How terrible is God in his holy sanctuary, the God of Israel, who gives power and strength to his people! Blessed be God. **R**

SECOND READING 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11. Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen

GOSPEL John 17:1-11 Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your

presence before the world existed. I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one."

POST COMMUNION Eternal God, giver of love and power, your Son Jesus Christ has sent us into all the world to preach the gospel of his kingdom: confirm us in this mission, and help us to live the good news we proclaim; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sunday Homily 24 MAY 2020 7th SUNDAY OF EASTER

"Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one." John 17:11

The way that people say goodbye is very personal, particularly the big goodbyes, the ones that happen when a child goes to school for the first time, or away to university. Or when a dear colleague that we find we've got so used to leaves for another job, or a good friend emigrates, or a loved one prepares to die. In short, when the people we love move on. Some people are very expressive: it's all tears, hugs and stories. Others are deadpan, keeping it all in. Many people make sure that they say their goodbyes beforehand, when they've got time, and emotions are not quite so high. Important things can't always be said and done on the doorstep.

In our Gospel reading from John, we are witnesses to just such a goodbye. In fact all of chapters 13 to the end of 17 are a goodbye – they could be called "the long goodbye", a good name for a film perhaps. Sandwiched between the raising of Lazarus – an echo of what's to come – and Jesus' betrayal and arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, these chapters are charged with the emotion of a painful but necessary farewell. Jesus talks about what he has done, and what it all means – not always, it has to be said, with great clarity. Jesus knows that they will not have time to say goodbye later, so now he talks of how the disciples are to behave, of how they will be bound together into a community of love, and that this will give them their distinctive and attractive nature as the people of God. He tells them that things will not be easy without him, but that they will be empowered by the Holy Spirit when he leaves. And in chapter 17, Jesus rounds it all off with a prayer. And what a prayer it is! The first part of the prayer cements Jesus' credentials. It's not just a matter of being received by God in heaven. Jesus is returning home to the glory he had with God in the beginning (remember those famous opening words to John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God..."). Jesus has told them before that he and the Father are one; now he again claims God's glory as his own. Then he prays for his followers: those who have believed that he is the Son of God, and who very soon will find themselves the keepers and tellers of the message. Jesus' oneness with God is extended to the believers. Somehow, this little band of rather unpromising humanity has become bound up with God in Christ. From that point on there is an unshakeable bond between God and humankind – something wholly different about the way that human beings relate to God. And then it all gets much simpler: a prayer for protection. Jesus must know that the hatred that he is about to experience will soon be extended to them. They haven't always been shining examples of steady faith; how will they cope without him? Things move on, of course, and when the time comes really to say goodbye, everything is too chaotic, too dangerous, too tortured, to say any of these things. So, over supper, Jesus says his farewells. Perhaps the disciples understand, perhaps they don't, but at least they have had the chance to hear Jesus' goodbye, and store it up as treasure for the future.

And here we are, all these years on. Somehow, the emotion and urgency of the moment in the upper room are gone, and it's hard to imagine just what it felt like. We can but try to put ourselves in the sandals of the ones who were there; try and look into Jesus' eyes and hear his words afresh. But that prayer still stands; still echoes across the centuries. A Palestinian peasant claims to be one with

God, and something in the fabric of the universe shifts. Humankind and God are bound together when they were once set apart, and an unshakeable bond is formed that cannot be broken by human frailty and petty mistakes. Things are possible that were never possible before. Things will change that we never thought would change. And how will it happen; how will we choose to be part of it? That's up to us, but we must always remember: whatever we do, Jesus' words of protection will ring in our ears.