

Fifth Sunday of Easter

[Reading I: Acts 9:26-31](#)

[Responsorial Psalm: 22:26-27, 28, 30, 31-32](#)

[Reading II: 1 John 3:18-24](#)

[Gospel: John 15:1-8](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/042824.cfm>



The first part of Acts of the Apostles presents the work of the Apostles in Judea and the surrounding communities. The church took root in those who knew and worshipped God.

In the first part of this chapter, Paul opposed this new faction of Judaism and sought to persecute Christians. Luke presents Paul's experience on the road and how Jesus appeared to him and called him to be a disciple. Our section for today then follows.

After being instructed, Paul begins to preach about Jesus, and then other members of the Jewish community seek to kill him. To escape danger, Paul journeys to Jerusalem. Luke highlights the fears people had about him and the unity in the church in Jerusalem. Paul joins them and preaches in Jerusalem. Luke strives to show the importance of connecting with the Apostolic community (Apostles and other first witnesses) for all ministry and for maintaining unity in the church. In the Acts,

In Galatians, Paul presents it differently. *"Then, after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to confer with Cephas (the Aramaic name of Peter) and remained with him for fifteen days. But I did not see any other of the apostles, only James, the brother of the Lord."* Paul presents his visit as a conferral. He did not know Jesus while he was alive and learned about him through others. He may have wanted to verify the information to make sure that he was preaching the truth. He presents himself as ministering independently of the Jerusalem church with a common message.

In the creed, we profess "One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church." The connection to the Apostles has been an essential element of the church. It conveys authenticity and foundation in the original message. The bishop in each diocese represents the link to the Apostolic community.

The second reading seeks to identify authentic disciples. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a primary indicator. The Spirit can accomplish great things far beyond what we can do. A disciple is called to live according to the teachings of Jesus which are expressed in two primary commands. First, we believe in Jesus as the Son of God. Faith in Jesus is not something that we can accomplish on our own. It is God's gift to us. God's Spirit leads us to faith. It is not a rational process where we find enough facts to prove that Jesus is the Son of God. Facts can help and can give us words to express our faith. Faith itself is a spiritual act that establishes a relationship and a way of life. Christians were first identified as members of "The Way." Only later did the title Christian (One like Christ) become the name for followers of Jesus.

Secondly, the Spirit empowers us to "love one another." This is not easy. This command challenges us to seek the good of others. The grace to recognize others as children of God, our sisters and brothers, can only come from the Spirit. To love others with the love that

God has, to help them be their best and develop their gifts, is the work of God in us. When you are aware of faith or the ability to love others, thank the Spirit of God for working in you.

The passage opens with, "*Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth.*" St Ignatius taught the same message. "*Love ought to manifest itself in deeds rather than in words.... love consists in a mutual sharing of goods, for example, the lover gives and shares with the beloved what he possesses, or something of that which he has or is able to give; and vice versa, the beloved shares with the lover.*" Thus, every disciple will become a witness to Jesus.

The Gospel passage is drawn from Jesus' discourse at the Last Supper. John's Gospel presents Jesus dying on the day of preparation for the Passover. (Matthew, Mark, and Luke connect the Last Supper with Passover.)

To support and strengthen the disciples who will soon be traumatized by the death of Jesus, he offers a lengthy discourse. One section is provided here, and another section is next Sunday. Disciples through the ages and even today continue to experience times of disconnection, struggle, or lack of direction in life. These words are thus spoken to disciples of every age.

Jesus speaks of himself as the vine and disciples as branches. It can be difficult to tell where the vine ends, and the branches begin. After a year or two, where the vine was previously trimmed looks like the vine itself. All parts of the plant are dependent upon the vine to bring water and nutrients from the ground. So, every disciple should resemble Jesus and always draw life and strength from Jesus. Jesus has given us the Eucharist to be our source of life and strength. As one matures in the Christian life, a person should resemble Christ in words and deeds in an ever-increasing way.

Jesus points out that the Father prunes branches that do not bear fruit. God invites disciples to surrender every area of life to God. Sometimes it means leaving a job or a relationship. Other times it can be letting go of a dream so that we can care for another. Any difficulty or loss can be a moment of growth and a new beginning. This is the message of Christ dying and rising to new life.

The nurturing and growth in the Christian life is called spirituality. Spirituality is the process of nurturing one's spirit. Schools and teams nurture spirit by developing practices that promote common goals. Christians promote spirit through practices that advance particular virtues and greater awareness. These help individuals draw upon God's graces and life.

There is a wide variety of spiritualities in Christianity. Many spiritualities have several dimensions to them. Any of these can be helpful to people. Some may be helpful at one point in life and another later. They are like a library which one can draw upon at various times and for different needs.

The earliest spiritualities developed to help people deal with the allurements of the pagan practices of the second and third-century world. Some sought to flee the cities and live in the desert to pursue a more intimate relationship with God with hours of prayer each day. These individuals were hermits or hermitesses and were known as the desert mothers and fathers.

When people in more northern climates sought to withdraw from the cities, it was challenging to live in isolation, and monasteries developed. St Benedict formed groups of people to live in a community. They would pray individually and together each day, hold

property in common, and divide up responsibilities of daily life. Benedictine spirituality offered three ways to grow spiritually: through praying the Psalms together, prayerfully reading scripture alone, and using one's talents in work to serve God and enrich the human community.

Dominican spirituality has focused on the search for the truth. If all truth is from God, then any truth, theological, scientific, social, or artistic, is a way to find God. Franciscan spirituality has focused on poverty. Jesus impoverished himself in becoming human. We are invited to join Jesus in being with the poor and marginalized. Ignatian spirituality seeks to help people find God in all things. Ignatius promoted the practice of a daily reflection on the events of the day to become aware of God's presence in one's life. Other spiritualities have stressed contemplation, praying the Rosary, or other devotions. Each person needs to find the spirituality that best helps them connect more fully with God and draw strength from God.

Themes:

Apostolic Church
Spiritualities

The Holy Spirit's work in believers
Ecumenism

Reflection Questions:

What importance does the Apostolic community have for the church and for you?

Can you recognize any indications of the Spirit at work in your life?

How do your words and deeds reflect Christ in your life?

How have you experienced pruning in your life?

What fruit have you borne as a Christian?

What does belonging to a community mean to you?

Prayer Suggestions:

For the Church: that we may continually draw life from Christ and bear a rich harvest of virtues and Gospel values for God's glory

For all who help others deepen their relationship with God: that parents, catechists, and spiritual directors may continue to grow in their relationship with God so that they can support the growth of others

For the grace to surrender: that God will help us to let go of those things which need to be pruned so that God's life and love may blossom in our lives

For a renewed spirit of evangelization: that the Spirit will help us to give witness to the good news of God's love in deeds of loving service and acts of justice

For all who feel cut off from God, friends, themselves, or life itself: that God will help them to recognize that God is with them and from whom they can draw life