



a Kendall Hunt Company

Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year A, catechist - RCLB Lectionary



Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session read all the readings.

Acts 6:1-7

Psalm 33:1-2, 4-5, 18-19

1 Peter 2:4-9

John 14:1-12

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word or image that engages you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

The Word in Liturgy

As the Easter season progresses, our attention is drawn from intimate encounters with the risen Jesus and relationships within the young community of faith to a more outward-looking focus. Today's passage from Acts forms the connection between the ministry in Jerusalem, and the spread of the Gospel to Samaria and beyond. Although the dispute between the Hellenists (Greek-speaking Jews) and Hebrews (Aramaic-speaking Jews) is reportedly concerned with the impartial distribution of charity to widows, the actual function of the seven who are appointed to see to these needs seems later in Acts to be prophetic ministry rather than table service. A link between the two may be found, however, in Luke's persistent association of authority over material goods with spiritual authority. Those who are chosen to serve at table are ipso facto spiritual leaders. The imposition of hands by the apostles suggests a passing of power to the seven chosen for service (*diakonia*). It is worth noting that authority rested with the Twelve, yet the community's approval was sought and the community actually chose the seven. Although the Sacrament of Holy Orders is a later development in the Church, passages such as this one—where service to the community is empowered by a laying on of hands—would later in Christian history be seen as prototypes of ordination.

Our Gospel passage is taken from the Farewell Discourse at the Last Supper, and addresses concerns of the disciples that arise because of the departure (i.e., death) of Jesus soon to occur. In the context of its liturgical proclamation at this point in the Easter season, this

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reading also invites us to reflect on the coming “departure” of Jesus in the Ascension and the impact on us believers of the physical absence of Jesus. What are the disciples to do without him? What do we do without this reassuring presence? First of all, the passage assures us that Jesus will return and take his followers with him. The reference seems to be to the *parousia*, though it may also be interpreted as a reference to being reunited with Jesus at death. The immanent departure of Jesus is presented not as a loss but as a preparation for the future. The expression “many dwelling places” of the Father’s house (“mansions” is a mistranslation) suggests not a diversity of place within heaven but that there will be room enough for everyone in God’s eternal presence.

Catholic Doctrine

The Sacrament of Holy Orders and the Common Priesthood of the Baptized

There is one priesthood: that of Jesus Christ. The Lord is the one high priest, and his ministry is accomplished as a servant (CCC 1551). The Son has been made holy and sent by the Father to serve the needs of the world and to accomplish our redemption in humility (LG 28).

Jesus Christ himself sends the Holy Spirit upon the whole body of the Church and endows the community of the faithful with a share in his servant nature. Thus, as the Second Vatican Council teaches, Jesus makes the whole Church a sharer in the Spirit in which he has been anointed, that is, “all the faithful are made a holy and kingly priesthood, [for] they offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ, and they proclaim the virtues of him who has called them out of darkness into his admirable light” (PO 2). It is by Baptism that the members of the Church are privileged to share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ (CCC 1591).

Founded upon this common priesthood of all believers and directed to its service, there is yet another form which participates in the priesthood of Jesus. This is the ministry given as a gift through the sacrament of Holy Orders. This is called the ministerial priesthood. While the priesthood of all believers is worked out in a life of faith, hope, and love, the ordained (or ministerial) priesthood exists in order to assist and serve the full flowering of the baptismal call of all. Those who are ordained to the ministerial priesthood enable the Church to be built up into its full baptismal stature (CCC 1547).

The center and high point of the ministerial priesthood is the celebration of the Eucharist. The Second Vatican Council reminded us, “The purpose then for which priests are consecrated by God . . . is that they should be made sharers in a special way in Christ’s priesthood and, by carrying out sacred functions, act as his ministers who through his Spirit continually exercise



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his priestly function for our benefit in the liturgy" (PO 5).

