



a Kendall Hunt Company

Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year A, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session read all the readings.

Acts 1:12-14

Psalm 27:1-4, 7-8

1 Peter 4:13-16

John 17:1-11

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

Today's reading from Acts very simply depicts the Church, after the ascension of Jesus and before the coming of the Spirit, united in a state of prayerful expectancy. The eleven, so important to Luke's narrative, are named, as is Mary the mother of Jesus. As this is the first time Mary is referred to by name in Luke since the infancy narratives, the mention of her brings to mind a parallel between the Spirit's overshadowing of Mary at the conception of Jesus, and the Spirit overshadowing her and the other disciples at the birth of the Church. Other women and Jesus' "brothers" (an expression, common in that culture, which indicates all male relatives) are also present, thus illustrating that the community was neither all-male nor limited to the eleven. In saying that they are gathered together in prayer, Luke employs one of his favorite words to point toward spiritual unity: *homothumadon*. In other words, his vocabulary (nuances of which may be hard to detect in translation) suggests that not only individuals but also this gathering "together" is significant.

The psalm which follows is full of joyful confidence springing from contemplation of God's own loveliness and the beauty of God's dwelling place. In its liturgical setting it underscores both the prayer motif of the first reading and the anticipation the Church feels as Pentecost approaches.

The injunction to "rejoice" in suffering which we hear in 1 Peter is not a counsel of masochism. Rather, it is an accurate description of Christian experience. The experience of



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faithful suffering is a gateway to some of the most profound aspects of the mystery of our redemption (such as the radical trustworthiness of God, and the development of our own capacities for compassion and solidarity with others). Christ himself is the font of rejoicing. But the way to Christ is through the cross. The author is careful to point out that there are two kinds of suffering: one which we bring on ourselves by doing evil and another simply because of our adherence to Christ and all that it implies. The first is to be avoided absolutely. The second is to be embraced unconditionally. It is the Spirit who enables us to do this.

The “priestly prayer” of Jesus at the Last Supper (first so-called by Cyril of Alexandria in the fifth century), of which today’s gospel is a part, has a highly charged immediacy that draws the listener into the dialogue of Jesus with his heavenly Father. In this lengthy prayer, reminiscent of Moses’ last words, he speaks about his coming death and glorification as a present reality, as if we have stepped into the “eternal now” of God.

Both the first part of the reading, pertaining to Christ himself, and the last, pertaining to his followers, are important because his coming glorification and the fulfillment of his mission are intertwined with the fate of his disciples. He prays in an intimate way about the disciples whom he will leave behind. They remain present to God because they belong to God, have been personally entrusted to Jesus, and have received the message Jesus came to share. In a passage which so frequently speaks of glory as an attribute of God and the works of God, it is particularly striking that Jesus says his followers are the ones in whom he is glorified. Drawn into full intimacy with God the Father by the Son, these treasured disciples have become part of the mystery of God’s love and are thus the place where Jesus is glorified.

Our doctrinal focus today may therefore be the mystery of the Church—gift of the Father (John), glory of the Son (John), and work of the Holy Spirit (1 Peter). It is the Church, gathered together in prayerful anticipation of the Spirit’s ever-new advent (Acts), which shows forth the gift of unity that is both the sign and the instrument of the coming kingdom.

Catholic Doctrine

Christian Unity

The Nicene Creed, formulated by the Council of Constantinople (381 a.d.), proclaims our Catholic belief that the marks or characteristics of the Church are fourfold: unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity—all of which are a gift from on high through Christ (CCC 811). In today’s Gospel, Jesus prays to the Father, and in his prayer entrusts to the disciples everything that had been entrusted to the Son. Because the last verses of the gospel passage emphasize the relationship between the Father and the Son, and between believers and the Son, this essay will focus on the first characteristic of the Church, unity.



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The Church is characterized by unity because the source of the Church is One: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are intimately united, three persons in one God. This characteristic of the Church, unity, is a gift given by the Holy Spirit and is of the very essence of the people of God who are bound together as one in Christ (CCC 813). St. Clement of Alexandria (d. 215 A.D.), wrote, “What an astonishing mystery! There is one Father of the universe, one Logos of the universe, and also one Holy Spirit, everywhere one and the same; there is also one virgin become mother, and I should like to call her ‘Church.’” (Paedagogus 1, 6, 42: PG 8, 281)

As Catholic teaching holds, the significance of the characteristic of Church unity is that to be fully what the Church is meant to be, believers must maintain harmony and union among themselves. Every divisive instinct or practice must be minimized, such as prejudice and factionalism. In other words, overcoming those divisions within the body of the Church is an essential task because an essential mark or characteristic of the Church is unity (ModCathE 544). The Second Vatican Council extolled and challenged the Church, saying, “Hence that messianic people, although it does not actually include all . . . and at times may appear as a small flock, is, however, a most sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race” (LG 9). Thus, the Church, which is described as “the seed” sown among the peoples of the world, cannot fulfill this mission for unity unless the very body of believers within the Church is visibly striving for union among its own members.

Unity or communion within the Church is a result of the redemption achieved by Christ which restores our relationship with God and with one another (CCC 766). This gift of unity, as Jesus indicates in the gospel, is entrusted to us. Yet, historically, Christians have experienced division into different denominations, churches, and communions. These separations are caused by sin, although those today who are raised in and baptized into separated churches are not responsible for this sin. They are brought up believing in Jesus and baptized into Christ—and the Catholic Church accepts them as separated brothers and sisters in the Lord who are gifted with the name

“Christian” (CCC 818). These divisions, however, create scandal and diminish Christian witness in the world. The Second Vatican Council noted that there is ample historical record that indicates that the responsibility for these divisions must be shared (UR 3).

Regardless of the historical record, the Church is called as a whole body and as individuals to heal divisions and work for unity. First, we must live faithfully within our own Catholic communion and to put our own house in order, striving for a deepening of our own conversion and living out the gospel message (UR 6). Second, we must develop proper attitudes, striving in our lives and in our public and private prayer for a change of heart and strength to assist in the ecumenical movement (UR 8). Third, we must work to understand the outlook of our separated brothers and sisters, as the Council says, to treat each other “on an equal footing” (UR 9). Fourth, an organized dialogue is encouraged between us and our



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separated brothers and sisters “comparing doctrines with one another,” and searching for the truth, with love and humility (UR 11). Finally, prayer for Christian unity should consume us all as we cooperate and collaborate where we can for the coming of the kingdom of God (UR 8).

