

Fifth Week of Easter

Monday 11th May



Acts 14:5-18

First reading

We have come with good news to turn you to the living God

Eventually with the connivance of the authorities a move was made by pagans as well as Jews to make attacks on the apostles and to stone them. When the apostles came to hear of this, they went off for safety to Lycaonia where, in the towns of Lystra and Derbe and in the surrounding country, they preached the Good News.

A man sat there who had never walked in his life, because his feet were crippled from birth; and as he listened to Paul preaching, he managed to catch his eye. Seeing that the man had the faith to be cured, Paul said in a loud voice, 'Get to your feet – stand up', and the cripple jumped up and began to walk.

When the crowd saw what Paul had done they shouted in the language of Lycaonia, 'These people are gods who have come down to us disguised as men.' They addressed Barnabas as Zeus, and since Paul was the principal speaker they called him Hermes. The priests of Zeus-outside-the-Gate, proposing that all the people should offer sacrifice with them, brought garlanded oxen to the gates. When the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard what was happening they tore their clothes, and rushed into the crowd, shouting, 'Friends, what do you think you are doing? We are only human beings like you. We have come with good news to make you turn from these empty idols to the living God who made heaven and earth and the sea and all that these hold. In the past he allowed each nation to go its own way; but even then he did not leave you without evidence of himself in the good things he does for you: he sends you rain from heaven, he makes your crops grow when they should, he gives you food and makes you happy.' Even this speech, however, was scarcely enough to stop the crowd offering them sacrifice.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 113B(115):1-4,15-16

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia, alleluia!

Christ has risen and shone upon us
whom he redeemed with his blood.

Alleluia!

Gospel

John 14:21-26

The Advocate, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything

Jesus said to his disciples:

‘Anybody who receives my commandments and keeps them will be one who loves me; and anybody who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I shall love him and show myself to him.’

Judas – this was not Judas Iscariot – said to him, ‘Lord, what is all this about? Do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?’ Jesus replied:

‘If anyone loves me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make our home with him.

Those who do not love me do not keep my words.

And my word is not my own:

it is the word of the one who sent me.

I have said these things to you while still with you;

but the Advocate, the Holy Spirit,

whom the Father will send in my name,

will teach you everything

and remind you of all I have said to you.’

Fr Tim’s Reflection

The first readings this week continue to tell the story of, what we call, the first missionary journey of St Paul. Barnabas is his travelling companion. As they go through town after town, they proclaim the message of the resurrection of Jesus, sometimes with success, but sometimes not. At every stage it is the Holy Spirit who inspires and directs their actions. It is the Holy Spirit who defends them in their moments of need. They are learning to trust in God’s providence.

On their journey they encounter a man who is crippled. In the name of Jesus they command the man to stand up, and he is cured. Peter and John had performed a similar miracle on Pentecost Sunday. The people of this town misunderstand and think that Paul and Barnabas are themselves gods and that it is through their own power that the miracle has been performed. Paul has to try very hard to convince them otherwise.

The Gospels all during this week continue the farewell discourse of Jesus to his disciples in John’s gospel. The whole passage lasts for four chapters. In today’s section Jesus repeats his command that they should love one another. But then he promises to send the his Holy Spirit – the same spirit we have seen at work in the Acts of the Apostles.

Jesus uses a new name for this second helper. In the translation we have before us, this helper is called the “advocate”, but other translations stick to the original Greek word the “paraclete”. Both are drawn from ancient legal practices. An advocate (from the Latin *ad* = “for” and *vocare* = “to speak”) is one who will speak in our defence. He will be the teacher and councillor. We have all seen the courtroom dramas in movies where the clever lawyer is able to uncover the truth by able questioning.

The Greek term paraclete (*para* = “on our behalf” and *kletus* = “to shout”) is slightly stronger than its Latin counterpart. Here the councillor is more passionate in speaking in defence of his client. The courtrooms of ancient Greece were not so calm as ours today.

Jesus is promising his disciples that the Holy Spirit will be on their side and that whatever happens, God will defend us with skill and with passion. Perhaps today we can feel some of the passion the Holy Spirit feels towards us.

Fifth Week of Easter

Tuesday 12th May



First reading

Acts 14:19-28

They gave an account of how God had opened the door of faith to the pagans

Some Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium, and turned the people against the apostles. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the town, thinking he was dead. The disciples came crowding round him but, as they did so, he stood up and went back to the town. The next day he and Barnabas went off to Derbe.

Having preached the Good News in that town and made a considerable number of disciples, they went back through Lystra and Iconium to Antioch. They put fresh heart into the disciples, encouraging them to persevere in the faith. 'We all have to experience many hardships' they said 'before we enter the kingdom of God.' In each of these churches they appointed elders, and with prayer and fasting they commended them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe.

They passed through Pisidia and reached Pamphylia. Then after proclaiming the word at Perga they went down to Attalia and from there sailed for Antioch, where they had originally been commended to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.

On their arrival they assembled the church and gave an account of all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith to the pagans. They stayed there with the disciples for some time.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 144(145):10-13a,21

Gospel Acclamation

cf.Lk24:46,26

Alleluia, alleluia!

It was ordained that the Christ should suffer
and rise from the dead,
and so enter into his glory.

Alleluia!

A peace the world cannot give is my gift to you

Jesus said to his disciples:

‘Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you,
a peace the world cannot give,
this is my gift to you.

Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.

You heard me say: I am going away, and shall return.

If you loved me you would have been glad to know that I am going to the Father,
for the Father is greater than I.

I have told you this now before it happens,
so that when it does happen you may believe.

I shall not talk with you any longer,
because the prince of this world is on his way.

He has no power over me,
but the world must be brought to know

that I love the Father

and that I am doing exactly what the Father told me.’

Fr Tim’s reflection

The first reading concludes the first missionary journey of Paul, accompanied by Barnabas. They began at Antioch and after hundreds of miles travelling by sea and on foot, they arrive back to the place from which they set out.

As it was this Christian community who had sent them out in the first place, it is to this community that they gave an account of their travels and adventures. On their return journey they pass through places they had already evangelised and they give new heart to the believers in these towns. In order for these fledgling churches to become self-sufficient, after prayer and fasting, they appoint elders tasked with keeping the community of believers together. “Elders” (= *presbiteroi*) could be translated as priests, except they have a very different function from the priests of the Old Testament. It is their task to preserve the unity of the community. A priest, on the other hand, was one set apart by the community to offer sacrifice on their behalf.

As part of his saying goodbye to the disciples, Jesus, at the last supper, “bequeaths” to them a special gift. His legacy is the gift of peace. By this he does not mean simply the absence of things that disturb us. The peace of Jesus is an inner conviction that can sustain us while what is happening around us is far from peaceful.

The disciples will shortly see this sort of peace in action as Jesus carries his cross on his road to Calvary. There is a moment of disquiet in the garden, where Jesus doubts that this was truly the Father’s will, but once he is convinced he remains composed even though the actions of those around him are outside of his control.

On their mission to spread the Good News, the disciples experience this sort of peace for themselves. Their journeys are fraught with danger, they are persecuted, imprisoned and stoned. Yet, despite all of this, because of the strength they draw from the Holy Spirit, they maintain their composure in exactly the same way as Jesus had done.

Jesus’ gift was not just for those gathered about the table with him. We too share in his legacy. Sometimes things are happening outside of our control. We are worried and anxious. We feel insecure. It is precisely at moments like that that we can claim a share in this legacy. We know that God loves us and that we can trust in his Fatherly care. No father would give his child a stone when he asked for food. Jesus is teaching us that, in all situations, God is on our side.

Fifth Week of Easter

Wednesday 13th May

Feast of Our Lady of Fatima



First reading

Acts 15:1-6

They were to go up to Jerusalem and discuss the problem with the apostles and elders

Some men came down from Judaea and taught the brothers, 'Unless you have yourselves circumcised in the tradition of Moses you cannot be saved.' This led to disagreement, and after Paul and Barnabas had had a long argument with these men it was arranged that Paul and Barnabas and others of the church should go up to Jerusalem and discuss the problem with the apostles and elders.

All the members of the church saw them off, and as they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria they told how the pagans had been converted, and this news was received with the greatest satisfaction by the brothers. When they arrived in Jerusalem they were welcomed by the church and by the apostles and elders, and gave an account of all that God had done with them.

But certain members of the Pharisees' party who had become believers objected, insisting that the pagans should be circumcised and instructed to keep the Law of Moses. The apostles and elders met to look into the matter.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 121(122):1-5

Gospel Acclamation

Jn10:14

Alleluia, alleluia!
I am the good shepherd, says the Lord;
I know my own sheep and my own know me.
Alleluia!

Gospel

John 15:1-8

I am the vine, you are the branches

Jesus said to his disciples:
'I am the true vine,
and my Father is the vinedresser.
Every branch in me that bears no fruit
he cuts away,
and every branch that does bear fruit
he prunes to make it bear even more.
You are pruned already,
by means of the word that I have spoken to you.
Make your home in me, as I make mine in you.
As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself,
but must remain part of the vine,
neither can you unless you remain in me.
I am the vine,
you are the branches.
Whoever remains in me, with me in him,
bears fruit in plenty;
for cut off from me you can do nothing.
Anyone who does not remain in me
is like a branch that has been thrown away – he withers;
these branches are collected and thrown on the fire,
and they are burnt.
If you remain in me
and my words remain in you,
you may ask what you will
and you shall get it.
It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit,
and then you will be my disciples.'

Fr Tim's reflection

Yesterday, Paul and Barnabas had returned to Antioch and made an account of their travels. The community rejoiced in what had been achieved. However, this state of affairs was short lived. Some Christian visitors from Jerusalem objected to the fact that the Good News had been preached to those who were not Jews. In their eyes, they had no right to salvation. As we shall see on Friday, it would take a Council of the Church to resolve this issue.

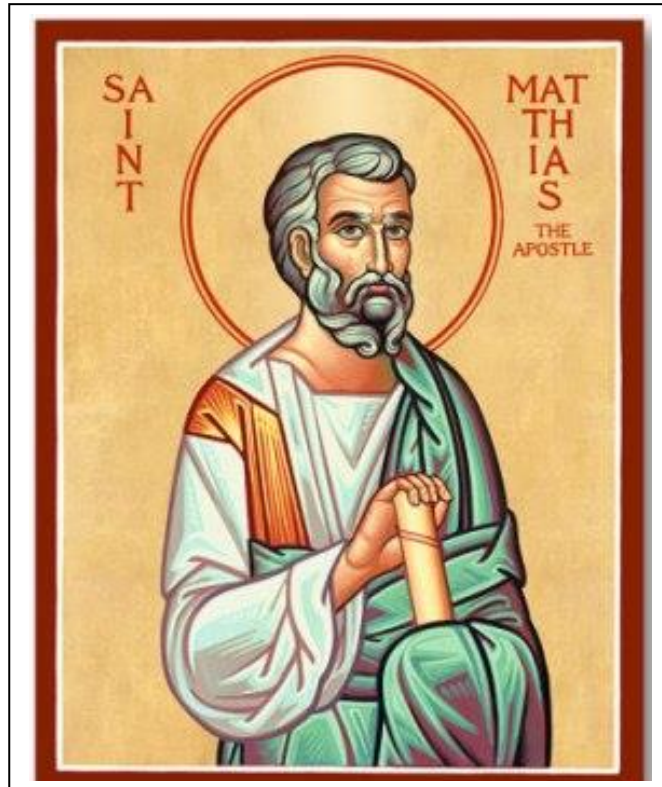
Today we recall the one hundred and third anniversary of the apparition of Mary to some children in Fatima, in Portugal. The visits of Mary would continue for the next 5 months. These events took place some 60 years after she had appeared to Bernadette in Lourdes in France. Today both are places of pilgrimage where people flock to seek Mary's intercession. The key message of Fatima was that peace would be achieved through much prayer and she encouraged the children to say their rosaries often. Devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary was also encouraged.

May is the month especially dedicated to honouring Mary as our mother. During this month we can say the rosary frequently and commend our intercession to her Immaculate Heart.

Fifth Week of Easter

Thursday 14th May

St Matthias, Apostle



First reading

Acts 1:15-17,20-26

'Let someone else take his office'

One day Peter stood up to speak to the brothers – there were about a hundred and twenty persons in the congregation: 'Brothers, the passage of scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit, speaking through David, foretells the fate of Judas, who offered himself as a guide to the men who arrested Jesus – after having been one of our number and actually sharing this ministry of ours. Now in the Book of Psalms it says:

Let his camp be reduced to ruin,

Let there be no one to live in it.

And again:

Let someone else take his office.

'We must therefore choose someone who has been with us the whole time that the Lord Jesus was travelling round with us, someone who was with us right from the time when John was baptising until the day when he was taken up from us – and he can act with us as a witness to his resurrection.'

Having nominated two candidates, Joseph known as Barsabbas, whose surname was Justus, and Matthias, they prayed, 'Lord, you can read everyone's heart; show us therefore which of these two you have chosen to take over this ministry and apostolate, which Judas abandoned to go to his proper place.' They then drew lots for them, and as the lot fell to Matthias, he was listed as one of the twelve apostles.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 112(113):1-8

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia, alleluia!
I chose you from the world
to go out and bear fruit,
fruit that will last,
says the Lord.
Alleluia!

Gospel

John 15:9-17

You are my friends if you do what I command you

Jesus said to his disciples:
'As the Father has loved me,
so I have loved you.
Remain in my love.
If you keep my commandments
you will remain in my love,
just as I have kept my Father's commandments
and remain in his love.
I have told you this
so that my own joy may be in you
and your joy be complete.
This is my commandment:
love one another, as I have loved you.
A man can have no greater love
than to lay down his life for his friends.
You are my friends,
if you do what I command you.
I shall not call you servants any more,
because a servant does not know
his master's business;
I call you friends,
because I have made known to you
everything I have learnt from my Father.
You did not choose me:
no, I chose you;
and I commissioned you
to go out and to bear fruit,
fruit that will last;
and then the Father will give you
anything you ask him in my name.
What I command you
is to love one another.'

Fr Tim's reflection

Today we celebrate the feast of St Matthias, the disciple chosen to replace Judas to preserve the number of disciples to 12. The sequence of reading from Acts is interrupted today so that we can listen to the account of how Matthias was chosen. Apparently there were two candidates, equally qualified to be witnesses to the ministry of Jesus, but Matthias was chosen over Joseph by casting lots.

The Gospel continues the last supper discourse of Jesus. Matthias would not have been there around the table with Jesus, but the others would have told him what Jesus had said to them. Key to being a friend of Jesus is to be faithful to his love. In this way will "our joy be complete". The disciples are commissioned to go out in Jesus' name and teach the commandment of love.

Fifth Week of Easter

Friday 15th May



First reading

Acts 15:22-31

It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by us not to burden you beyond these essentials

The apostles and elders decided to choose delegates to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; the whole church concurred with this. They chose Judas known as Barsabbas and Silas, both leading men in the brotherhood, and gave them this letter to take with them:

‘The apostles and elders, your brothers, send greetings to the brothers of pagan birth in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. We hear that some of our members have disturbed you with their demands and have unsettled your minds. They acted without any authority from us; and so we have decided unanimously to elect delegates and to send them to you with Barnabas and Paul, men we highly respect who have dedicated their lives to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accordingly we are sending you Judas and Silas, who will confirm by word of mouth what we have written in this letter. It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves not to saddle you with any burden beyond these essentials: you are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols; from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from fornication. Avoid these, and you will do what is right. Farewell.’

The party left and went down to Antioch, where they summoned the whole community and delivered the letter. The community read it and were delighted with the encouragement it gave them.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 56(57):8-12

Gospel Acclamation

Jn10:27

Alleluia, alleluia!

The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice,
says the Lord,

I know them and they follow me.

Alleluia!

What I command you is to love one another

Jesus said to his disciples:

‘This is my commandment:

love one another,

as I have loved you.

A man can have no greater love
than to lay down his life for his friends.

You are my friends,

if you do what I command you.

I shall not call you servants any more,
because a servant does not know

his master’s business;

I call you friends,

because I have made known to you

everything I have learnt from my Father.

You did not choose me:

no, I chose you;

and I commissioned you

to go out and to bear fruit,

fruit that will last;

and then the Father will give you

anything you ask him in my name.

What I command you is to love one another.’

Fr Tim’s reflection

The dispute over the admittance of people who were not Jews into the Christian fellowship is finally resolved in a meeting that we now call “the Council of Jerusalem”. Since this time the whole church has gathered to resolve difficult problems 21 times, the most recent being the Second Vatican Council held in Rome in the 1960’s.

Paul and his companions travel to Jerusalem to present their case to the “pillars of the Church”. The part of their testimony that clinches the decision is when they recount how the non-Jewish believers received the Holy Spirit at their baptism in exactly the same way as the disciples themselves on Pentecost Sunday. Thus it is decreed that gentile Christians do not have to be circumcised and they do not have to keep the whole of the law of Moses. As we see in the letter sent to Antioch, they are simply to adhere to these essentials: “you are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols; from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from fornication.” If it were not for this courageous decision, Christianity today would still be a sect within Judaism. Now the mission of the church could really take off.

The final instructions of Jesus to the disciples in today gospel get intimate. Jesus tells them that they are not his servants, but his friends. They have been chosen and commissioned. They can make decisions with his authority.

His instructions are equally valid for us today. Decisions we make as a church, arrived at through mutual love, have the authority of Jesus himself.

As we are discovering, the post Covid-19 world will be very different from the world we have become accustomed to. Our Roman Catholic Church will need to change and adapt to these changing circumstances as we learn to proclaim the Good News in very different ways. Some will embrace these changes wholeheartedly and some will resist. However, to discern the correct way forward, we need to be united in love. We need to learn to listen to the concerns of each, and we need to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit as we are directed towards the church of the future. The Acts of the Apostles gives us a blue-print that we can follow. We pray that the Holy Spirit will be with us.