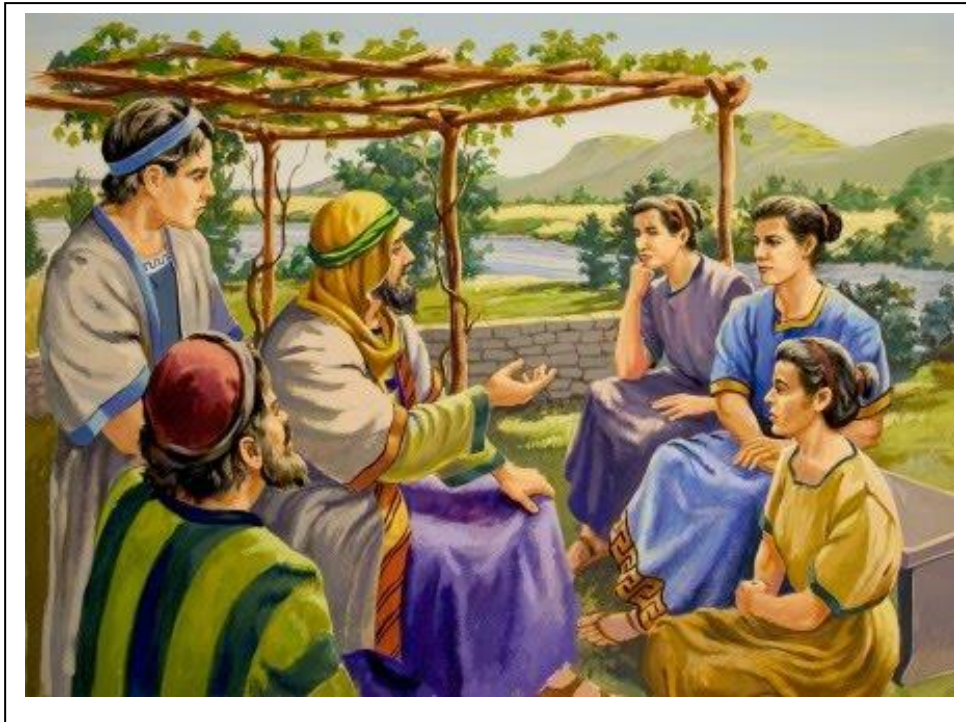


# Sixth Week of Easter

## Monday 18<sup>th</sup> May



**Acts 16:11-15**

### **First reading**

#### **The Lord opened Lydia's heart to accept what Paul was saying**

Sailing from Troas we made a straight run for Samothrace; the next day for Neapolis, and from there for Philippi, a Roman colony and the principal city of that particular district of Macedonia. After a few days in this city we went along the river outside the gates as it was the Sabbath and this was a customary place for prayer. We sat down and preached to the women who had come to the meeting. One of these women was called Lydia, a devout woman from the town of Thyatira who was in the purple-dye trade. She listened to us, and the Lord opened her heart to accept what Paul was saying. After she and her household had been baptised she sent us an invitation: 'If you really think me a true believer in the Lord,' she said 'come and stay with us'; and she would take no refusal.

### **Responsorial Psalm**

**Psalm 149:1-6,9**

### **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!

**The Spirit of truth will be my witness**

Jesus said to his disciples:

‘When the Advocate comes,  
whom I shall send to you from the Father,  
the Spirit of truth who issues from the Father,  
he will be my witness.

And you too will be witnesses,  
because you have been with me from the outset.

‘I have told you all this that your faith may not be shaken.

They will expel you from the synagogues,  
and indeed the hour is coming  
when anyone who kills you  
will think he is doing a holy duty for God.

They will do these things  
because they have never known  
either the Father or myself.

But I have told you all this,  
so that when the time for it comes  
you may remember that I told you.’

**Fr Tim’s Reflection**

In the first reading today, Paul is on his second missionary journey, this time with Silas as his companion. He covers a great deal of territory as he travels from one major city to the next. Today, in Philippi, he meets an influential woman, named Lydia, who welcomes him into her home. She is in the purple dye trade, a very lucrative business, as only royalty are allowed to wear purple.

We know that the Acts of the Apostles was written by Luke, the author of the gospel that bears his name. Normally he writes in the third person: “Paul did this” or “Paul went to such and such a place”, but suddenly the text breaks into the first person: “Sailing from Troas *we* made a straight run for Samothrace”. This has led many commentators to suspect that Paul has picked up another travelling companion, that Luke himself accompanies Paul on this leg of his journey. This means that for the next few chapters we have a first-hand account of what happened to Paul.

On his journeys Paul meets many people from every strata of society. It seemed that Christianity of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD was a great social leveller. Meeting on the Lord’s day for the breaking of the bread, slaves would rub shoulders with the wealthy and the powerful, and in these communities, everyone would look after each other. Often Paul’s message would meet with hostility, but here in Philippi, at least, he seems to meet with some success.

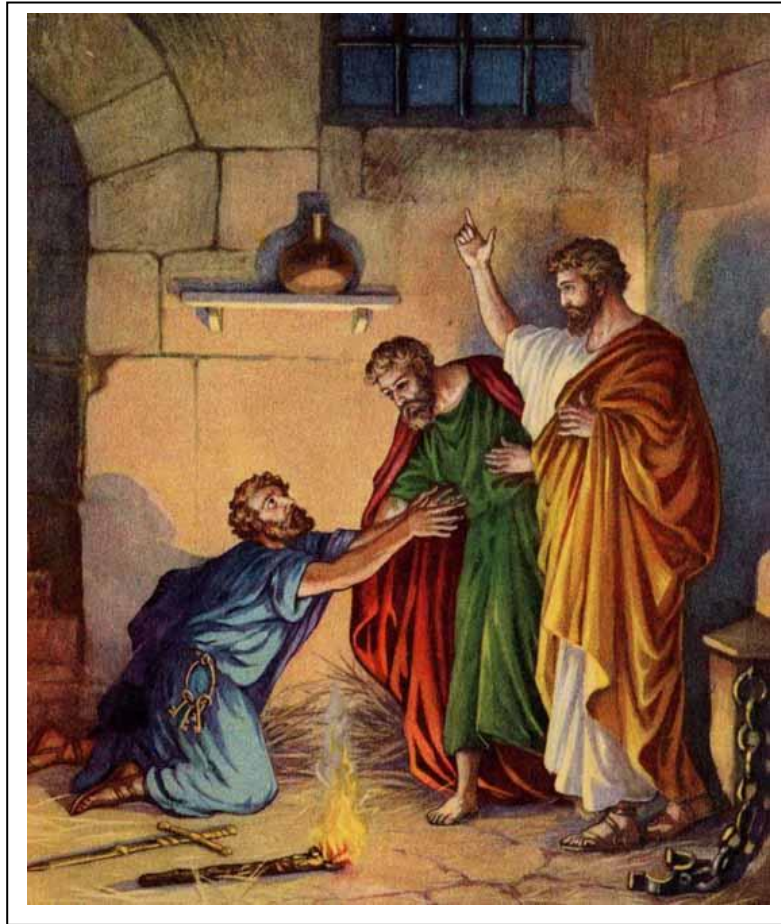
In the gospel today, Jesus continues to prepare the disciples for the reception they might get once they are on mission. They must be prepared for rejection and persecution, and those doing this will think that they are doing a holy duty for God. Paul himself changed from being a persecutor of the way into its greatest defender. Even today, in some parts of the world, spreading the word comes at great personal expense.

Over these weeks in lockdown we have had more time to reflect on our faith and on the gospel message. We have had time to reflect on our own faith journeys and those who have affected us as we grew in the faith. Perhaps looking back on how we came to know the Lord, we can identify moments of struggle. Perhaps there was not external opposition, but it is common in those who are growing in the ways of the Lord that there are internal obstacles that have to be overcome.

During this week we celebrate the feast of the ascension, so perhaps in our prayers we can turn our minds to the gifts that the Holy Spirit brings. What gift do I need to help me overcome my resistance to being a whole hearted follower of Jesus?

# Sixth Week of Easter

## Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> May



### First reading

Acts 16:22-34

#### **Become a believer and you will be saved, and your household too**

The crowd joined in and showed their hostility to Paul and Silas, so the magistrates had them stripped and ordered them to be flogged. They were given many lashes and then thrown into prison, and the gaoler was told to keep a close watch on them. So, following his instructions, he threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Late that night Paul and Silas were praying and singing God's praises, while the other prisoners listened. Suddenly there was an earthquake that shook the prison to its foundations. All the doors flew open and the chains fell from all the prisoners. When the gaoler woke and saw the doors wide open he drew his sword and was about to commit suicide, presuming that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted at the top of his voice, 'Don't do yourself any harm; we are all here.' The gaoler called for lights, then rushed in, threw himself trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas, and escorted them out, saying, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They told him, 'Become a believer in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, and your household too.' Then they preached the word of the Lord to him and to all his family. Late as it was, he took them to wash their wounds, and was baptised then and there with all his household. Afterwards he took them home and gave them a meal, and the whole family celebrated their conversion to belief in God.

### Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 137(138):1-3,7-8

## **Gospel Acclamation**

Alleluia, alleluia!

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

Alleluia!

## **Gospel**

**John 16:5-11**

### **Unless I go, the Advocate will not come to you**

Jesus said to his disciples:

‘Now I am going to the one who sent me.

Not one of you has asked, “Where are you going?”

Yet you are sad at heart because I have told you this.

Still, I must tell you the truth:

it is for your own good that I am going

because unless I go,

the Advocate will not come to you;

but if I do go,

I will send him to you.

And when he comes,

he will show the world how wrong it was,

about sin,

and about who was in the right,

and about judgement:

about sin: proved by their refusal to believe in me;

about who was in the right: proved by my going to the Father and your seeing me no more;

about judgement: proved by the prince of this world being already condemned.’

## **Fr Tim’s Reflection**

It is through the conversion of a slave girl that Paul finds himself in trouble again. The slave girl earned her masters a great deal of money by being a fortune teller. As a Christian she could no longer do this, and her owners were not pleased. They have Paul and Silas thrown into prison.

Here the Acts follows closely what happened to Peter when he was first arrested. In the middle of the night there was an earthquake and the doors were opened and the chains fell from the prisoners hands and feet. Only this time the prisoners do not try to get away.

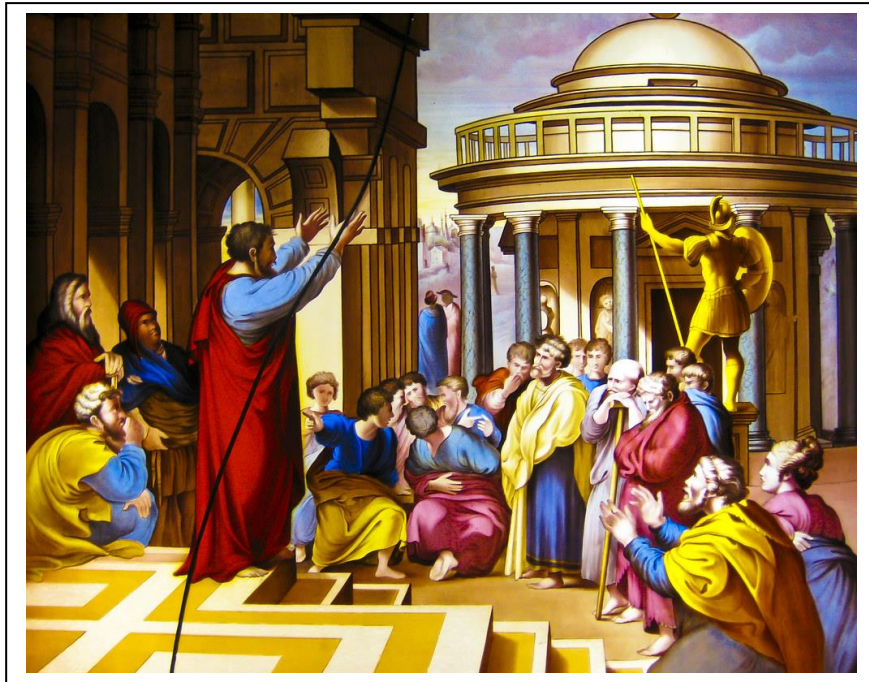
When the guard wakes up and finds the doors open he is very much distressed. He knows he can be punished for letting the prisoners go, so he is about to commit suicide. Paul calls to him – he is amazed that though they could have escaped, Paul and Silas are still in custody. This results in the man and his whole family being baptised and becoming Christians. Of course, they celebrate their conversion.

In the gospel, Jesus is promising the Holy Spirit: he says that unless he goes to the Father, the Holy Spirit will not be able to come. We know that Jesus lived at a specific time and preached in a given place. Though he was God, his human nature prevented him from being in many places at the same time. Even in his risen body, he would appear to his disciples but not to the whole people. In the incarnation, God becomes flesh, but that very flesh acts as a limitation as to where he can be and what he can do.

The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, has no such limitations. He can find a home in the hearts of all believers wherever they may be. God remains intimately connected with those who believe in him, but now on a spiritual level. With the Holy Spirit in charge, the Catholic Church can become a church that is truly universal. As we continue to pray for the gifts of the Spirit, let us ask for the gift of Knowledge, so that we can begin to understand the ways of God.

# Sixth Week of Easter

## Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> May



### First reading

Acts 17:15,22-18:1

#### **I proclaim the God you already worship without knowing it**

Paul's escort took him as far as Athens, and went back with instructions for Silas and Timothy to rejoin Paul as soon as they could.

So Paul stood before the whole Council of the Areopagus and made this speech:

‘Men of Athens, I have seen for myself how extremely scrupulous you are in all religious matters, because I noticed, as I strolled round admiring your sacred monuments, that you had an altar inscribed: To An Unknown God. Well, the God whom I proclaim is in fact the one whom you already worship without knowing it.

‘Since the God who made the world and everything in it is himself Lord of heaven and earth, he does not make his home in shrines made by human hands. Nor is he dependent on anything that human hands can do for him, since he can never be in need of anything; on the contrary, it is he who gives everything – including life and breath – to everyone. From one single stock he not only created the whole human race so that they could occupy the entire earth, but he decreed how long each nation should flourish and what the boundaries of its territory should be. And he did this so that all nations might seek the deity and, by feeling their way towards him, succeed in finding him. Yet in fact he is not far from any of us, since it is in him that we live, and move, and exist, as indeed some of your own writers have said:

“We are all his children.”

‘Since we are the children of God, we have no excuse for thinking that the deity looks like anything in gold, silver or stone that has been carved and designed by a man.

‘God overlooked that sort of thing when men were ignorant, but now he is telling everyone everywhere that they must repent, because he has fixed a day when the whole world will be judged, and judged in righteousness, and he has appointed a man to be the judge. And God has publicly proved this by raising this man from the dead.’

At this mention of rising from the dead, some of them burst out laughing; others said, ‘We would like to hear you talk about this again.’ After that Paul left them, but there were some who attached themselves to him and became believers, among them Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman called Damaris, and others besides.

After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.

**Gospel Acclamation**

**Col3:1**

Alleluia, alleluia!  
Since you have been brought back to true life with Christ,  
you must look for the things that are in heaven, where Christ is,  
sitting at God's right hand.  
Alleluia!

**Gospel**

**John 16:12-15**

**The Spirit of truth will lead you to the complete truth**

Jesus said to his disciples:  
'I still have many things to say to you  
but they would be too much for you now.  
But when the Spirit of truth comes  
he will lead you to the complete truth,  
since he will not be speaking as from himself  
but will say only what he has learnt;  
and he will tell you of the things to come.  
He will glorify me,  
since all he tells you  
will be taken from what is mine.  
Everything the Father has is mine;  
that is why I said:  
All he tells you  
will be taken from what is mine.'

**Fr Tim's Reflection**

People these days like to talk about their "bucket list" the things they would like to do before they die. In our gospels over the last few weeks, we see Jesus ticking off an important item on his bucket list. He wanted to prepare his followers for what would happen after he died and after he ascended back into heaven. Today he is teaching them about the complete truth which they will learn once they have received the Spirit. It was that truth that has led to our faith in Jesus today.

Paul must have had a bucket list as well. He was driven to spread the word to as many towns and cities as possible. Today he reached a very important location. He finds himself in Athens, the centre of culture and learning of his day.

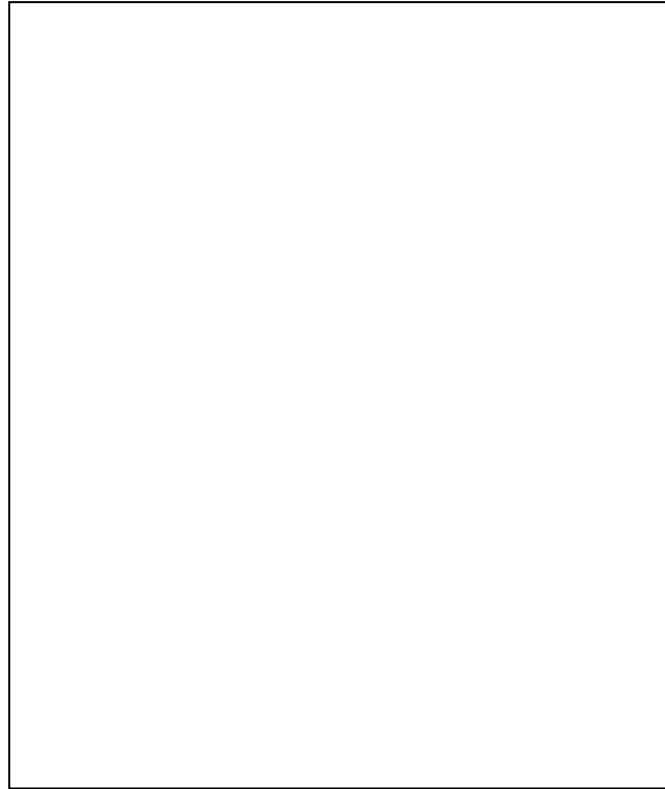
Before jumping into his task of evangelisation, he takes some time off for some sight-seeing. Athens is full of magnificent buildings and temples, testimony to the success of this ancient civilisation.

The Greeks had many gods, and life for them was complicated as each of these deities had to be appeased. Paul notices one temple in particular: "The temple to the unknown god". Perhaps the Greeks built this one in case, in their array of gods, one had accidentally been missed out.

Paul takes this shrine as his point of departure. All along the Greeks had been worshipping a god they did not know, and now Paul was here to reveal to them who this god is; the one true living God. He does very well until he comes to the part about God raising Jesus from the dead. For many Greeks, this is a step too far, but some are curious and want to learn more.

During today, the day before the Ascension of the Lord, perhaps we can imagine how Jesus would have spent his last day on earth. I'm sure most of it would have been spent with the disciples as he strengthened their faith.

**Sixth Week of Easter**  
**Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> May**  
**The Ascension of the Lord**



**(see the sheet already distributed)**

# Sixth Week of Easter

## Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> May



### First reading

Acts 18:9-18

**'I have many people on my side in this city'**

At Corinth one night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision, 'Do not be afraid to speak out, nor allow yourself to be silenced: I am with you. I have so many people on my side in this city that no one will even attempt to hurt you.' So Paul stayed there preaching the word of God among them for eighteen months.

But, while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a concerted attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal. 'We accuse this man' they said 'of persuading people to worship God in a way that breaks the Law.' Before Paul could open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, 'Listen, you Jews. If this were a misdemeanour or a crime, I would not hesitate to attend to you; but if it is only quibbles about words and names, and about your own Law, then you must deal with it yourselves – I have no intention of making legal decisions about things like that.' Then he sent them out of the court, and at once they all turned on Sosthenes, the synagogue president, and beat him in front of the court house. Gallio refused to take any notice at all.

After staying on for some time, Paul took leave of the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had his hair cut off, because of a vow he had made.

### Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 46(47):2-7

### Gospel Acclamation

Jn14:26

Alleluia, alleluia!

The Holy Spirit will teach you everything  
and remind you of all I have said to you.

Alleluia!



**Your hearts will be full of joy that no-one will take from you**

Jesus said to his disciples:

‘I tell you most solemnly,  
you will be weeping and wailing  
while the world will rejoice;  
you will be sorrowful,  
but your sorrow will turn to joy.

A woman in childbirth suffers,  
because her time has come;  
but when she has given birth to the child she forgets the suffering  
in her joy that a man has been born into the world.

So it is with you: you are sad now,  
but I shall see you again, and your hearts will be full of joy,  
and that joy no one shall take from you.

When that day comes,  
you will not ask me any questions.’

**Fr Tim’s Reflection**

These days between the Ascension and Pentecost are a strange time. We have celebrated Jesus departure to take up his place at the right hand side of the Father, but the Holy Spirit has not yet come. For the church, this is a season of intense prayer. We pray for the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the strength to carry out our own calling. The readings of this season encourage us by showing us the example of Paul, who now arrives in Corinth.

We know that Paul had a soft spot for the Christians of Corinth. Later he was to write two letters to them (there may have been four, but alas two were lost). Today in the first reading we learn he was to spend many months in this city.

Paul had been to Athens, the cultural centre of the world, but Corinth was the financial centre. A very wealthy hub where many commercial enterprises had their origin and headquarters. Later he would get to Rome, the political centre of the world and the seat of the mighty empire.

It is here in Corinth, that Paul comes across serious opposition. Through the Holy Spirit Paul learns of his impending persecution, but he is told to be strong. God will be on his side.

When the leading Jews complain of Paul to Gallio, the pro-consul, the Roman governor of this part of the empire, he appears to take no notice of their complaint. Paul is lucky this time and he is left in peace to do his work.

The gospel can also help us in our prayer as we await the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is telling the disciples about joy. He is not talking about a brief happiness, which we can experience when things seem to be going our way. No, Jesus promises a hard earned joy, which once achieved, nothing can take from us.

We can make this one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that we can pray for at this time. Being under lockdown, we have not been able to do many things which we enjoy. Perhaps this has helped us to refocus on what brings us a joy so deep that, no matter what happens to us, it cannot be taken away. Jesus tells the disciples that when they experience this joy, they will know the complete truth and they will not need to ask any more questions.

So let us pray for a deep sense of contentment, so that we too will no longer be searching for the truth, but will have found the truth which is our final resting place. As St Augustine said in his confessions: “Our hearts are restless until we find our rest in you”.