

LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS FOR EASTER 5A

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Acts 7:55-60

Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16

1 Peter 2-10

John 14:1-14

Acts 7:55-60

In this chapter from the Acts of the Apostles, we have another example of a sermon. Previously we looked at Peter's sermon in response to the Pentecost experience and saw how God added thousands to the numbers of the Church. In the section of Acts before today's selection, Stephen delivers a stirring account of salvation history that ends with insults and accusations toward the religious leaders of the day. This prophetic, truth-telling sermon costs Stephen his life as the leaders gather around him to stone him to death. The account of Stephen's death is written in such a way to remind us of the Crucifixion of Jesus, from Stephen's commendation of his spirit to the Lord to his plea that the sins of those who are killing him not be held against them. How is Stephen able to remain so true to his witness? The clue is in the first part of today's reading when Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, gazes into heaven and proclaims, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" Stephen is able to keep faithful witness because of his **FOCUS**. Like a sailor at sea, who keeps his focus on the North Star in order to stay on track, Stephen keeps his eye on Jesus in the heavens. His soul remains shielded and protected and he gains eternal salvation because he keeps his focus on the Resurrected Christ.

Where is your FOCUS? What keeps you anchored and on the right track? Do you have your eyes focused on the Resurrected Christ or is your heart focused on something less worthy?

Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16

Into your hands I commend my spirit, for you have redeemed me O LORD, O God of truth. These words from verse 5 of Psalm 31 have traditionally been part of the bedtime prayers for Jewish children and are part of our own service of Compline. They remind us that our beginnings and endings are always in the sight of God. ***My times are in your hand (v. 15).*** Our times indeed are in God's hand. Our lives depend on Him and we are sheltered from all assaults. The best place for our spirit to be commended is into this shelter.

Where do you place your soul? Your well-being? Your spirit? Your livelihood? Do you have a sense that all of your times are in the hands and eyes and mind of God? To what do you submit?

1 Peter 2:2-10

In the continuation of his letter to the exiled Jews of the Dispersion, Peter reminds the people of important things to remember. First, he encourages them to consider themselves newborn infants that long for the nourishing, spiritual milk that will help them grow into the salvation that has been given them. This is a useful idea to remember on Mother's Day as we give thanks for those who have

nurtured us here in our earthly lives. God is providing this nourishment so that we will grow into spiritually strong children. Second, Peter reminds us that the purpose of the growth of our strength is that we are living stones that God is going to use to fashion into a spiritual house that is holy and acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Each living stone comes with its own set of spiritual gifts that complement the gifts of the living stones around them – all to the Glory of God and to the accomplishment of God's mission for His Kingdom. In the end, all of us are **CHOSEN** for transformation so that God's Kingdom may be realized. We were people of darkness, but now have come into the light. We were once not a people, now we are God's people. We once did not have mercy, and now we experience mercy abundantly.

Do you have a sense of the source of your own spiritual nourishment? Where do you find nurturing, spiritual milk – in reading Scripture? Spending time in prayer? Doing acts of mercy? Spending time with your family and with other Christians? Beholding Creation? What are the gifts that make up you as a Living Stone? You were CHOSEN to be where you are. Can you see how your gifts complement those of others in your Christian community?

John 14:1-14

The Good News in this Gospel reading is that if we believe, we can depend on our belief to lead us into action that will accomplish good works. Jesus draws a clear connection between dwelling in the Father, dwelling in Him and accomplishing good works. It is not that the good works are done in order to earn salvation. They are done because our dwelling with God and God dwelling with us produces good works as a by-product of the indwelling. And Jesus assures us that this indwelling, in fact this inter-dwelling, can take many forms. ***In my Father's house there are many mansions.*** There is room for God to dwell in all of us and for us to dwell in Him. So ***belief*** leads to ***action*** which produces ***works***. Jesus is indeed the way, the truth and the life.

How do you have a sense of God dwelling in you? Can you think of a time when your belief has spurred you into action? What was the end result of that action? Do you have a sense of the wideness of God's mercy? Of the many dwelling places within God's Kingdom?

THE COLLECT:

Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.