



SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

CYCLE B

Acts 1:15-17, 20a, 20c-26

1 John 4:11-16

John 17:11b-19

GATHERING

(Some spring flowers and a lighted candle are arranged on a table in the gathering place.)

This week's scriptures' portrayal of both Jesus and the early church in situations of prayer invite our reflection on the theme of prayer in our own lives. Last week we considered with John the centrality of love in the message of Jesus. Name some concrete instance when love shaped the way you lived this past week. *(Members share briefly.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(Keeping time, the facilitator invites the community to a full three minutes of silent acknowledgment of the presence of God. Then three members pray with the community as follows.)

All: Alleluia.

I: Bless the LORD, O my soul;
and all my being, bless his holy name.

Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits.

All: Alleluia.

II: For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so surpassing is his kindness toward those who fear him.
As far as the east is from the west,
so far has he put our transgressions from us.

All: Alleluia.

III: The LORD has established his throne in heaven,
and his kingdom rules over all.
Bless the LORD, all you his angels,
you mighty in strength, who do his bidding.

All: Alleluia.

(A selection of instrumental music is played.)

Focus Question

How hard/easy is it for you to sit down and do nothing for an extended period of time?

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are read aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the gospel, the facilitator invites members to mention a word, a phrase or an image from one of the readings that particularly struck them this week. Members then go on to read over the commentary and consider the questions in silence for several minutes before entering into conversation.)

Commentary

Some years ago while I was serving on a parish staff, a conversation with a woman who was the religious education committee chairperson turned to the topic of prayer. Pat bemoaned the fact that her hectic-paced life, including all her church activities, made it difficult to slow down, to pray. About a week later, I remembered the conversation. On a whim, I

picked up the phone and dialed her number. When she answered, I said, “This is the voice of the Holy Spirit. You are to sit down now and do absolutely nothing for the next five minutes. I will call you back when time is up.” I hung up. After five minutes, I called her back. The phone did not get to finish one ring before she answered. “I can’t do it; I just can’t do it,” she cried.

Pat’s plight is not unique. It’s often also mine. It’s a plight too many of us experience. And yet, “[p]rayer is the life of the new heart. It ought to animate us at every moment.”¹ In this week’s scriptures, we see both Jesus and the early church at prayer. In response to Peter’s call to find a replacement apostle for Judas, the community proposed two names. “Then they prayed....” In the gospel, John, recounting the conclusion to Jesus’ farewell discourse portrays Jesus praying on behalf of the disciples.

Prayer is being in touch with oneself being in touch with our God. It begins by slowing down, noticing one’s life. When the swirl slows, we can begin to get a sense of the movement of God in the midst of our soul, in the midst of our life. “For me,” says St. Therese of Lisieux, “prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven; it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.”²

Prayer is not just passive quietude. Prayer is active listening. It puts one in touch with God’s call. It opens a path to respond to the action of God in one’s life. It moves one to service, witness, mission. When Jesus prays in this week’s gospel for his disciples, he prays for us all that we be unified, protected from the evil one and consecrated in the truth. He does so because he sends us “into the world”. We belong to him, not to the world, but we go to the world that it might belong to him. We need the life of prayer to survive the swirl, to help orient our world to God’s reign of justice and peace.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ How does the word, phrase or image that struck you from this week’s scriptures speak to your life, or the life of the community, your family or our world these days?

1. Catechism of the Catholic Church, par. 2697.

2. Ibid., par. 2558.

- ◆ How much time for personal prayer have you taken in the past month?
- ◆ What happens to you when you pray?
- ◆ From what evil do you pray for God's protection?
- ◆ To accomplish what is God *sending you into the world* these days?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

- ◆ Set aside twenty minutes some day this week to do nothing. Sit down and be! Pay attention to what happens. Let the swirl slow. Listen to the world within. Listen for God.
- ◆ Read the newspaper attentively this week. Notice issues that concern the common good of your town/city. Identify one that is particularly pressing, one that is unpopular for many to deal with. Introduce this issue appropriately into conversation this week with family, friends, neighbors, and fellow parishioners.
- ◆ Read around in Part Four of the **Catechism of the Catholic Church**. It is devoted to the many dimensions of Christian prayer.
- ◆ Make concrete plans to make a weekend retreat sometime in the next three months. Call a retreat house in your area to sign up *now*.

CLOSING PRAYER AND SENDING FORTH

(The community joins in singing, "Alleluia, Alleluia, Give Thanks." The song may be found on the Internet.)

(The facilitator invites members to mention in a phrase or a single sentence, some thought from this session which has stayed with them. He/she then calls the community to a full five minutes of silent prayer. The facilitator keeps time.)

(Members join in singing, "Benediction". The song may be found on the Internet..)