

## Fifth Sunday of Easter - A

I heard a story once, unverified unfortunately, but still possibly true, that when Jesus ascended to heaven there was great rejoicing among the angels. He had won the victory and was now about to be enthroned at the right hand of the Father in heaven. One of the angels happened to ask, “Lord, will you be returning soon to the earth to establish the fullness of the kingdom there? Jesus replied, “Not just yet.”

The angel continued, a bit perplexed, “Lord, if you don’t mind my asking, what will happen in the meantime? What’s the plan?” Jesus answered, “Not to worry. I left my disciples there to carry on until I return.”

You could have heard a pin drop. One of the other angels, looking a bit sheepish, asked, “Lord, do you think that will really work? You know, they haven’t really been that good at picking up on what you’ve been about. Do you really think they are up to the task?”

Jesus said, “I trust them. Besides, it’s not like they will have to do it on their own. The Holy Spirit is getting ready as we speak to take my place among them to lead them into the fullness of truth.”

Of course, you can see that I have this story merely on hearsay. I wasn’t present and cannot verify the details, but it does seem plausible. During the period of Jesus’ public ministry and throughout his Passion, the disciples did not acquit themselves well at all. And even in the aftermath of his resurrection they were slow on the uptake. But once the Holy Spirit descended, the situation improved. In the Acts of the Apostles Jesus’ disciples do, in fact, pick up where

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Jesus left off and begin to do the very same things that Jesus had done—and to be persecuted for them as he had been.

But new situations arose, unprecedented developments, that had no comparison to the time of Jesus' ministry; things he left no instructions for as to how to proceed. The time of Jesus' ministry had truly given way to the time of the Holy Spirit's inspiration.

For one thing no one had imagined what the success of the apostles' preaching would bring as consequences. As we often are the early Church had been caught off guard by new developments. In today's first reading the new development that needs to be addressed is the fact that the Christian community had become more diverse than what had been the case among Jesus' first followers. They had all spoken Aramaic, had lived their whole lives in Israel, and were relatively insulated from interaction with the broader world.

In the developing community in Jerusalem, though, once there was a multitude of people coming to the faith, it became apparent that, at least at this point, there were two broadly defined groups: the Hebrews, those who had always lived in Israel; and the Hellenists—Jews who had grown up outside of Israel in the midst of Gentile culture and whose first language was Greek. They probably knew some Aramaic from the synagogue but their day-to-day language was Greek.

Language continues to be a great barrier to community. As much as we might have in common with fellow Catholic

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Christians from the Hispanic community, for example, everyone feels more comfortable praying in his own language. Working to get past that, with bi-lingual liturgies, and build one common community of faith, for example, does not always meet with rousing approval to say the least.

The early community, to its credit, acknowledged the needs of the Greek-speaking widows and the whole community engaged in finding a response: reputable members filled with the Spirit and wisdom, were identified and given the task of attending to the emerging need. The ones chosen were all from the Greek-speaking contingent of the community and so perhaps would more readily find a welcome among the ones to be served.

As it turned out, at least two of the seven selected went on to engage in the proclamation of the Good News to the Gentiles with great success. Apparently they delegated the work of attending to the needs of the widows to other capable people.

All this took place because of the early Church's willingness to allow the Holy Spirit to lead it through uncharted territory. That's still the recipe for success to day for us who recognize how rapidly and unexpectedly the situation can change. Good for us that the Holy Spirit is not going anywhere. We have been promised by no one less than Jesus himself that the Holy Spirit will be with us always, even unto the end of the age.

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### General Intercessions

1. For the Church, that we may be a holy nation, a people God can call his own, as we announce the praises of the One who called us out of darkness into His own wonderful light, we pray to the Lord.
2. That the Lord, whose word is upright and whose works are trustworthy, may inspire leaders of nations with justice and right reason in their decisions and plans, we pray to the Lord.
3. For our mothers, who have given us life and love, that we may show them reverence and love, we pray to the Lord.
4. For mothers who have lost a child through death, that their faith may give them hope, and their family and friends support and console them, we pray to the Lord.
5. For our faithful departed ones, especially our mothers who have gone on ahead of us, that Jesus, who has prepared a place for each of them in the Father's house, may now welcome them home into heavenly joy, we pray to the Lord.