

# LITURGY NOTES

May 2023

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## In This Issue

In issue of *Liturgy Notes* we cover the readings and music suggestions for the end of the Easter season, through to Pentecost. There are notes on initiation sacraments in the Easter season, the Pentecost Vigil, and the singing of sequences.

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## Fifty Days of Initiation

One of the most visible features of our liturgy at this time of year is the frequent celebration of so-called “childhood sacraments.” Our churches welcome many families for baptisms, confirmations, and first communion. For those of us who celebrate these sacraments on Sundays, especially where we avoid celebrating them during Lent, it sometimes seems like these sacraments are steady feature of Sunday masses during the great fifty days of Easter.

For adults, at least for those adults who are being baptized, the time for these initiation sacraments is the Easter Vigil itself. The initiation sacraments are one of the most important, visible, and joyful aspects of the liturgy that night. For those baptized as infants, the celebration of the initiation sacraments could be any time. However, just as it is rather nonsensical to celebrate them during Lent, which exists for *preparation* for initiation, it is especially appropriate to celebrate them during the fifty days of Easter, more than at any other time of year.

We celebrate the initiation sacraments with adults at the Easter Vigil because of the Paschal nature of these sacraments: in our baptism we are buried with Christ in his death, so as to live in the hope of the resurrection, and the reading from Romans reminds us that night. But Easter isn't over on Easter Sunday morning; Paschal joy continues throughout the whole fifty days, culminating in the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Accordingly, if it sometimes seems like these great numbers of children are taking over our liturgies during this season, then all is as it should be. Just as at the Easter Vigil, throughout the whole of the season, every time we see someone baptized, confirmed, or joining us at the table, we are reminded of our own sharing in Jesus' death and resurrection, our own reception of the Holy Spirit, and the privilege of being at the table to partake of a foretaste of the kingdom of God. These children become, in a real way, a liturgical symbol for us, holding up a mirror to us of who we really are. This is a great way to continue in Paschal joy.

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**May 7, 2023**

**5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, A**

**Breaking Open the Word**

**First Reading: Acts 6:1–7**

As the numbers of baptized believers increased, so too did the responsibilities of “the twelve.” According to Acts 2:41–47, huge numbers of new believers had entered the community, and since everything was held in common, a great deal of sharing and organization had to take place. The passage we read today reflects a time when a more concrete community structure and delineation of roles was necessary for the smooth functioning of the community of believers. The situation is precipitated first by a lingering distinction between “Hellenists” and “Hebrews” – that is, between gentile and Jewish believers in Jesus. There are some indications that, even after Pentecost, it still took a while for gentile and Jewish believers to come to a common table fellowship, since Jewish traditions would have entailed restrictions on sharing food with non-Jews. In both groups, widows were among the most vulnerable and dependent on the generosity of others. The gentiles express the concern that “their widows” are being overlooked in the distribution of food each day. To address the situation, the Twelve say, “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to serve at tables” (6:2), and so, in order to ensure the smooth functioning of mealtimes, the community is asked to select seven men of good standing from within themselves to perform this task. Although this passage describes the distribution of food rations (and not the eucharistic rites), later tradition identifies these seven men as the first deacons.

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 33**

Psalm 33 exhorts believers to rejoice, praise, and have confidence in God’s goodness.

**Second Reading: 1 Peter 2:4–9**

Drawing extensively from the Old Testament, the author of 1 Peter describes how Christ is a

“living stone,” which has been chosen to become the cornerstone (see Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 28:16). Believers are “like living stones” who are chosen to build a “spiritual house.” This is a neat play on Peter’s name, which, of course, means “rock.” Peter draws on priestly imagery to describe the role of believers: they will offer spiritual sacrifices and be God’s own chosen people (see Exod 19:6).

**Gospel: John 14:1–12**

The household imagery continues in the gospel reading. Jesus describes the presence of the Father as a house in which there is space enough for everyone. Being part of the household of the Father would mean a believer is under both the protection and authority of the Father. Jesus describes his role as being the “Way” or conduit by which one comes to the Father. And yet, he is also more than an avenue or path, Jesus manifests the Father. What can Jesus mean? In the Greco-Roman world, the traditions of the Hellenistic gods included manifestations of the gods in different forms, but Zeus, who could appear as an eagle, a stallion, or a thundercloud, could always change into himself (in the stories). Philip, whose name is Greek, is justifiably confused: how can they have seen the Father if they know Jesus? Is Jesus going to morph into the Father?

Jesus’ explanation draws from familial structures rather than the theophanies of Greco-Roman myth. In a large and successful Greco-Roman household, the family home was more than just a house, it was a whole economy (we get our word economy from the Greek, *oikos*, house). The household was a place to live and a business that would include not only the biological family, but also any laborers or servants. The Father of the House was the highest authority and the embodiment of the whole household. However, if he could not attend a meeting or event, he could send his son. The important detail here is to remember that the Son of the House would not be only “himself” at this meeting: he would simultaneously manifest and “be” his Father. Whoever spoke to the Son of the House or interacted with him would be interacting with

the Father of the House. And whatever the Son of the House said or did, would be the words and actions of the Father of the House. Jesus uses this analogy to describe how to see him is to see the Father.

### Reflection

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” Jesus’ words are both a statement and can be a challenge. We might find ourselves sharing in Philip’s question, perhaps in an even sharper way, as, unlike Philip, we cannot “see” Jesus. Yet, the face of Christ is revealed to us in each person we meet — and even in our own faces when we contemplate in a mirror. How do these encounters reveal Christ, and through Christ, God the Father?

### Reflecting the Word in Song

Christians, Let Us Love One Another (PICARDY)  
CBW 595

God Our Author and Creator (BEACH SPRING)  
CIS 6.32

Be Not Afraid (B. Dufford)  
CBW 481 / G 430 / GP 24 / SS 271

Christ, You are the Fullness (ARIRANG)  
CBW 431

Eye Has Not Seen (M. Haugen)  
CBW 482 / G 450

I Am the Bread of Life (S. Toolan)  
G 597

Jesus Christ, Yesterday, Today and Forever  
(S. Toolan)  
G 540

Love Divine, All Loves Excelling (HYFRYDOL)  
CBW 625

Love Never Fails (K. Canedo & J. Manibusan)  
SS 132

The Servant Song (R. Gillard)  
G 476

The Summons (J. Bell)  
CIS 6.39 / SS 230

Ubi Caritas (J. Berthier)  
CBW 67 / G 301

You are the Way (NICOLAUS)  
CBW 441

May 13, 2023

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, A

### Breaking Open the Word

#### First Reading: Acts 8:5–8, 14–17

Luke describes the spread of believers beyond Jerusalem. Samaria is a particularly symbolic location, as it lay between Jerusalem and Galilee and its inhabitants were not considered to be truly part of Israel (see 2 Kings 17:24–41 and John 4). Philip baptizes some of the Samaritans, and when news of their belief reaches Peter and John, these two also visit the Samaritan believers. When Peter and John lay their hands on the newly baptized, the Holy Spirit comes upon them, confirming their new membership in the Church.

#### Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 66

Psalm 66 celebrates God’s actions as the creator and savior. Not only people, but also all of creation is invited to praise God.

#### Second Reading: 1 Peter 3:15–18

Believers are encouraged to persevere in faith, even if it involves suffering. Peter does not try to valorize suffering, but rather his aim is to reassure believers that if they are doing something good, to continue in that vein, even if it means suffering occurs. In the Greco-Roman world, suffering was understood to be a sign that a person had erred or was being punished. Peter rethinks this, urging his hearers to see suffering for goodness’ sake as a positive sign. He points to Jesus’ suffering for the sake of the righteous as the model and standard of this kind of endurance in faith.

#### Gospel: John 14:15–21

Today’s gospel reading continues from the previous week. Jesus anticipates his leaving, and he knows this will be difficult for his disciples, particularly after he has declared that he manifests the Father. What will happen after he goes away? Jesus promises the Spirit of Truth who will be their *paraclete* or “helper.” In Greco-Roman society the role of a *paraclete* was as an intercessor or patron. That is, a person who would act on behalf of the

powerless and ensure their survival. By describing the Spirit of Truth as a *paraclete*, Jesus assures his disciples that they will not be alone.

### Reflection

As we near Ascension and Pentecost, these readings give glimpses into how the early Church coped with Jesus' physical absence, yet still knew him to be present, alive, in their midst. Today's gospel, in particular, encourages us to invite the Holy Spirit into our lives as a helper and intercessor. What can we bring to the Spirit in prayer?

### Reflecting the Word in Song

Anthem (T. Conry)	G 494 / GP 13
Come Down, O Love Divine (DOWN AMPNEY)	CBW 407
Come, Holy Spirit (T. Booth)	SS 191
Go Make of All Disciples (ELLACOMBE)	CIS 6.28
God Our Author and Creator (BEACH SPRING)	CIS 6.32
Lord, Send Out Your Spirit (K. Canedo)	SS 88
Love Divine, All Loves Excelling (HYFRYDOL)	CBW 625
Love Never Fails (K. Canedo & J. Manibusan)	SS 132
No Greater Love (J.M. Joncas)	CBW 599 / G 444
Table of the World (NETTLETON)	CIS 6.30
Though the Mountains May Fall (D. Schutte)	G 426 / GP 214
Ubi Caritas (J. Berthier)	CBW 67 / G 301
Veni Sancte Spiritus (J. Berthier)	G 326
You Have Anointed Me (M. Balhoff et al)	G 483 / GP 81

## May 20, 2023 Ascension of the Lord

### Breaking Open the Word

#### First Reading: Acts 1:1–11

Today's first reading takes us to the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. After a period of forty days following his resurrection, Jesus prepares to ascend to heaven, and, gathered with his Apostles, mandates them to witness to him in Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth. In this way, Jesus describes the gospel message radiating outward from the holy city of Jerusalem. Importantly, Jesus redirects some of the Apostles' immediate concerns. Someone asks him if this is when "you will restore the kingdom to Israel?", indicating that some of his followers still expected a battle or a forceful takeover. Jesus indicates they will be equipped with a different kind of power — the power of the Holy Spirit, who will bolster them until Jesus returns again.

#### Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 47

Psalm 47 is an exuberant enthronement psalm, celebrating God as king.

#### Second Reading: Ephesians 1:17–23

Ephesus was a large city and an important trading centre in the Roman empire. The city was known for its devotion to the Greek goddess Artemis (Lat. Diana), to whom the citizens had erected an enormous temple in her honour. The Ephesians were a very cultured and community, with influential systems of honour and shame that structured society. Accordingly, Paul's letter to the Ephesians is very sophisticated and rich in Christological insights, as a way of addressing the community in an erudite manner.

In this passage, Paul describes Jesus as seated at God's right hand in power, almost the way a trusted prince would sit next to the Emperor. It is an image that would resonate with the Ephesians. Paul helps the Ephesians to understand that they are not subjugated under this new rule, but, as part of the Church which

is Christ's body, they are part of God's new dominion.

### Gospel: Matthew 28:16–20

These are the final lines of the Gospel of Matthew. The eleven disciples go to Galilee as they had been instructed, and Jesus appears to them, commissioning them to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Spirit. He promises that he will be “with you always,” neatly tying in with the revelation to Joseph in Matt 1:23, that the child would be “Emmanuel,” or “God is with us.” Jesus’ promise of his eternal presence ends the gospel on a note of hope and assurance.

### Reflection

“When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted” (Matt 28:17). Did that catch your eye too? We might wonder how some of his followers could have doubted — were they not seeing and standing in the presence of the risen Christ? And yet, there is something quite understandable about their very human misgivings. We might imagine how worn out, afraid, and uncertain his disciples felt. This passage, after all, takes place very shortly after Jesus’ crucifixion — a no doubt entirely traumatic event for his friends. It is very reassuring, therefore, that Jesus does not regard the doubt as a sign of their unworthiness. He still commissions his followers to spread his word and promises to be with them always. Their doubt is not the “fly in the ointment,” rather, Jesus promises to accompany and guide.

## Reflecting the Word in Song

Alleluia! God and Teach All People (T.B. Armstrong)	CBW 515
Alleluia! Sing to Jesus (HYFRYDOL)	CBW 426
Baptized in Water (BUNESSAN, CBW 650)	CBW 614
Go (L. Patillo)	G 323
Go Make of All Disciples (ELLACOMBE)	CIS 6.28
Go to the World (ENGELBERG)	CBW 508
Hail the Day That Sees Him Rise (LLANFAIR)	CBW 599 / SS 188
Hail Thee, Festival Day! (SALVE FESTA DIES)	CBW 388
I Send You Out (J. Angotti)	SS 214
Lord Jesus, We Must Know You (ST. THEODULPH)	CBW 517
Lord, You Give the Great Commission (ABBOT’S LEIGH)	CBW 69
One Sacrifice of Christ (R. Modlin, R. Feduccia)	SS 189
The Summons (J. Bell)	CIS 6.39 / SS 230
Table of the World (NETTLETON)	CIS 6.30

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## The Pentecost Vigil

The Vigil Mass for Pentecost Sunday may be extended with additional readings and prayers. The practice may not be observed in most parishes where the Saturday night Mass elapses under a tight schedule, but for those with time to give, the Vigil of Pentecost offers a profound experience. The Easter Vigil features up to nine Scripture readings, together with a series of psalms and prayers during the Liturgy of the Word. It is, in the words of St. Augustine, “the mother of all vigils” because it is so grand and has given birth to other forms of keeping vigil before the Lord’s Day.



Accordingly, the Pentecost Vigil may now be expanded. At Mass, when the extended form is used, the Glory to God is omitted before the Collect. Then the priest invites the people to keep vigil for the promised coming of the Spirit, as the apostles, the disciples, and Mary the Mother of Jesus did on the first Pentecost.

The Liturgy of the Word may include four Old Testament readings: the tower of Babel, Moses on Mount Sinai, Ezekiel's vision of dry bones, and the prophecy of Joel. A Responsorial Psalm and a prayer follow each reading. After the fourth Old Testament reading, the Glory to God is sung, and the priest offers another Collect. All this resembles the Easter Vigil's Liturgy of the Word. Mass resumes with the New Testament reading from Paul to the Romans and then continues as usual to the end. The entire Mass may also be blended with Evening Prayer. The psalms of Evening Prayer may expand the Introductory Rites, and the Magnificat may be sung after Communion.

It will not be to everyone's taste, but there may be an occasion when your community wishes to take a little extra time to pray for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and the expanded vigil provides an enriching opportunity.

Paul Turner

## The Pentecost Sequence

On a few occasions during the year, an unusual extra element can be added to the liturgy of the Word: a sequence. While the sequence is optional at other times, on two exceptionally solemn days, Easter Sunday and Pentecost, the singing of the sequence is technically required (GIRM #64). The Easter sequence is the *Victimae Paschali Laudes* ("Praise the Paschal Victim") and the Pentecost one is the *Veni Sancte Spiritus* ("Come, Holy Spirit"). The CBW provides the traditional chant tune for the Easter sequence, and sets the Pentecost sequence to a very simple hymn tune, along with providing an adaptation that uses an ostinato refrain for the congregation with the verses sung by a cantor.

Traditionally, it would follow after the Alleluia, before the gospel, which is a very odd structure. The gospel acclamation would be sung, and when everyone is expecting to hear the gospel next, this long other chant would be sung next. In our liturgical books today, however, the order is switched: the sequence comes much more sensibly after the second reading and *before* the gospel acclamation.

The reason for the strange placement is the origin of sequences, which originally grew out of the Alleluia itself. In the Middle Ages chant Alleluias came to have a distinctive feature: more and more notes on the final syllable, known as the "*jubilus*." The "ah" at the end would go on and on, as an expression of joy. Eventually medieval liturgical creativity took over, and new words were crafted to be sung to these extra notes, a different poetic text for any occasion. The extra text then later separated from the Alleluia, to become a liturgical element in its own right.

In the reforms of the Council of Trent, in the sixteenth century, the sequences, which numbered in the hundreds, were severely curtailed. Only a handful were left: the sequences for Easter, Pentecost, Corpus Christi, Our Lady of Sorrows (the *Stabat Mater* which is often sung at Stations of the Cross), and the *Dies Irae* for funerals (which is no longer mandated).

The texts are quite imaginative and rich, and provide a beautiful way to reflect on the meaning of these days. While there are challenges for a congregation to sing the Easter sequence in the given chant setting, the settings we have of the Pentecost sequence are straightforward and accessible. Besides the fact that they're mandatory on these two days, much more importantly, they enhance the solemnity of the occasion, and add an unusual creative touch to our liturgical celebrations.

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**May 27, 2023**

**Pentecost**

## **Breaking Open the Word**

### **First Reading: Acts 2:1–11**

There are two accounts of how the Holy Spirit came to be among the Apostles. The first takes place in the Gospel of John (our gospel reading for today), when Jesus appears among the disciples and breathes on them, saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). This is a very private and intimate bestowal of the Spirit. In contrast, in the first reading today, we hear how the Holy Spirit comes upon the Apostles in a very public and dramatic fashion. The rushing wind and tongues of fire evoke the theophanic experiences of the prophets in the Old Testament (see 1 Kings 18 for a good example). The disciples’ ability to speak and be understood in other languages recalls the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1–9), but here in Acts, God, through the Holy Spirit, uses the diversity of language to reach every person and unify humanity, rather than as a deterrent. The locations named essentially serve as a map, outlining the idealized reaches of the Roman Empire, encompassing the regions adjoining the Mediterranean Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Sinai Peninsula. This is a way of expressing the notion that God reaches out to the whole world through the Holy Spirit.

### **Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 104**

Psalm 104 reflects on the creative power of God’s Spirit, which infuses and sustains all of creation.

### **Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:3b–7, 12–13**

Paul’s beautiful insights in this passage stem from a very concrete situation in the Corinthian community. In Paul’s absence, some members of the Corinthian church were claiming they were superior to the others in the community, due to their assigned roles, their independent wealth, or even because of who had baptized them (1 Cor 1:10–17)! Paul does some impressive theological thinking in response to this crisis of solidarity in the

Corinthian community. In today’s passage, Paul teaches that one gift is not superior to another — whether it is preaching, teaching, prophesying, or interpreting (1 Cor 12:8–10). Paul says that all of these gifts are “activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses” (1 Cor 12:11). That is, in the Spirit, each person is gifted in their own way; one gift is not superior to the other, and all are necessary for the flourishing of the Church.

### **Second Reading (Alternate): Romans 8:8–17**

This passage comes at the end of the first half of Romans in which Paul addresses both Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, urging them to overcome any differences or friction between them. In the early decades of Christianity, ecclesial communities had to discern how to accommodate the variety of different backgrounds people had come from. Unlike today, when many Christians are born into a Christian family, the early Church communities were comprised of people from all walks of life and traditions. Accordingly, Paul speaks of their faith in Christ as coming into a new life, infused by the Spirit. This new life in the Spirit is vivified by the “Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead” (Rom 8:11). Since they all share in this same Spirit, they all share in “a spirit of adoption” — that is, they are all children of God, unified by their faith, who, like Jesus, can call “Abba! Father!” (8:15).

### **Gospel: John 20:19–23**

As mentioned above, this account of the gift of the Holy Spirit takes place very privately and quietly on the evening of Easter Sunday. The disciples have enclosed themselves in a house out of fear — a quite reasonable response in the wake of Jesus’ horrific death — and we might imagine that they are still in shock, grieving the loss of their friend. To compound their bewilderment, three of them (Mary Magdalene, Peter, and the Beloved Disciple), have had some reported that the tomb is empty, and Mary Magdalene has gone even further and said “I have seen the Lord!” (John 20:18). How can this be?

When Jesus appears among the disciples, notice the first thing he says, “Peace be with you” (John 20:19). “Peace” (Gk. *Eiréne*; Heb. *Shalom*), is the standard Jewish greeting, and it conveys a hope for total wellness and wholeness. In the Greco-Roman empire, “peace” was the promise of the Emperor for the conquered territories — the so-called “*pax Romana*” (Roman peace) — but this was enforced with threats and brute strength. Indeed, Jesus’ crucifixion can be understood as part of enforcing the *pax Romana*, since he was put to death to avoid insurrection and rioting. This hardly signifies true peace or wellness. When Jesus greets his disciples with “Peace be with you,” he bears on his resurrected body the marks of his crucifixion and suffering. It is a powerful way to indicate that the brutality of the empire did not win.

Jesus repeats his greeting of Peace, and then breathes the Holy Spirit upon them. Just as in Genesis, when the first human is animated by God’s breath (Gen 2:7), so too Jesus inaugurates his disciples’ new life in the resurrection through breathing the Spirit among them. Interestingly, it coincides with the ability to discern and forgive the sins of others. Why would this be part of the gift of the Holy Spirit?

If we recall Genesis 2–3, the one prohibition for the man and the woman was that they could not eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. According to the creation account in Genesis, the ability to discern between good and evil was a privilege enjoyed only by God (see Gen 3:22). The gift of the Holy Spirit that Jesus bestows on his disciples is a huge gift of trust and spiritual oneness. With this gift Jesus essentially says, “together in faith, you are children of God and share in my life with the Father. This gift comes with the ability to discern good and evil. This gift requires your wisdom and love.”

## Reflection

Candidates preparing for Confirmation are accustomed to hearing about the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit: Wisdom, Knowledge, Counsel, Fortitude, Understanding, Piety, and Fear of the Lord. Today’s readings invite everyone to consider the movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives. How are we animated by the Spirit? Do we listen to the Spirit’s promptings? Do we find peace in the Spirit’s counsel?

## Reflecting the Word in Song

Come Down, O Love Divine (DOWN AMPNEY)  
CBW 407

Come, Holy Spirit (LAMBILOTTE)  
CBW 416 / SS 193

Come, Holy Spirit (T. Booth)  
SS 191

Everyone Moved By the Spirit (C. Landry)  
GP 68

Filled With the Spirit’s Power (TOULON)  
CBW 413

God Our Author and Creator (BEACH SPRING)  
CIS 6.32

God the Spirit, Guide and Guardian (HYMN TO JOY)  
CBW 510

Lord, Send Out Your Spirit (K. Canedo)  
SS 88

O Holy Spirit, by Whose Breath (EISENACH)  
CBW 412

Send Out Your Spirit (J. Manibusan)  
SS 349

Sequence for Pentecost  
CBW 419 / CBW 692 / SS 192

Spirit Blowing Through Creation (M. Haugen)  
CBW 415 / G 325

Spirit of the Lord (L. Deiss)  
GP 208

Veni Sancte Spiritus (J. Berthier)  
G 326

You Have Anointed Me (M. Balhoff et al)  
G 483 / GP 81



## Credits:

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