

A SPIRITUAL HOUSE

By Al Mansfield

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 7:55-60

Psalm 31

1 Peter 2:2-10

John 14:1-14

A SPIRITUAL HOUSE

In our first reading today, seven deacons are appointed to help build the House of God - the Church. The second reading speaks about our being built up into "a spiritual house." In the gospel, Jesus refers to many dwelling places in the Father's house. We see that God is definitely in the house-construction business!

ACTS

Today's first reading relates the selection of "seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom." This action was taken to resolve a specific conflict. The Hellenists (Greek speakers) complained that their widows were being neglected in the daily food distribution.

The Apostles hold fast in maintaining that their first priority is ministering the word of God, so they choose assistants to take care of handling temporal needs. The Apostles "prayed and laid hands on them," thereby ordaining the seven men to this position. Traditionally, this event has come to be seen as the origin of the order of the diaconate in the Church.

The reading concludes with a "progress report" - the spreading of the word of God and great numerical growth in the Church...even among Jewish priests!

1 PETER

Our second reading this Sunday is again taken from the First Letter of Peter. This selection compares the followers of Christ to a building - "a spiritual house"- as well as a "holy priesthood."

Jesus is the cornerstone of this spiritual house - once rejected but now "chosen and precious." This reading makes use of several Old Testament quotations:

Isaiah 28:16 - "Behold, I am laying a stone in Zion, a cornerstone, chosen and precious, and whoever believes in it shall not be put to shame."

Psalm 118:2 - "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."

Isaiah 8:14 - "A stone that will make people stumble, and a rock that will make them fall."

Exodus 19:6 - "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises" of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

GOSPEL

As we approach closer to the Ascension, we read from the Last Discourse in John's gospel. In this particular passage we hear the Lord's encouragement to his disciples: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me." (The word "believe" better translates the original than "have faith." The noun "faith" does not appear in John's gospel, but some form of the verb "believe" occurs over 100 times.)

Jesus promises that he is going to prepare a place for his followers in his Father's house. He also promises to come back and take his disciples with him.

When Thomas questions him regarding "the way," Jesus responds, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to Father except through me."

Philip asks to see the Father. Jesus replies, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." Jesus emphasizes that the Father "dwells in me."

This passage ends with Jesus promising that whoever believes in him will do the works that he does, and even greater works - a clear preview of his Ascension and sending of the Holy Spirit.

EYES ON HEAVEN

Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us with his Father. We get there only by going through him - the way, the truth, and the life. We have our eyes fixed on heaven - on Jesus - while we are in exile here on earth, in this "valley of tears," as we pray in the Hail Holy Queen. Let us frequently recall the words of Jesus to us today: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me."