

17 May 2026 -- 7th Sunday of Easter 'A'

[Acts 1:12-14; 1 Peter 4:13-16; John 17:1-11](#)

H O M I L Y

In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke rejoices that the preaching of the Good News begins in Jerusalem. He sees in this the fulfilment of the prophecies concerning the future Jerusalem and its role in a restored universe. This central place of Jerusalem is also evident in his Gospel, which opens and closes in the Temple.

In Acts, as in Luke's Gospel, the Ascension of Jesus is described with a wealth of symbols, the spiritual message of which it is important to discover. What we celebrated on Ascension Day is not a material phenomenon, a sort of space journey by Jesus, anticipating modern technology! Jesus, after his resurrection and ascension, was not transformed into a sort of satellite orbiting the earth, high up in the sky. It is a mystery we have celebrated, a spiritual reality: the fact that, although Jesus has left us, he is as present to us as before, albeit in a new mode of presence.

In the Gospel of John we find a different spiritual sensibility. His Gospel is built around the theme of the *glorification* of the Son, and the culmination of the entire Gospel lies in Jesus' great priestly act, his death on the cross. The text from this Gospel that we have just read belongs to Jesus' third discourse after the Last Supper, which gives us his priestly prayer. On the verge of death, Jesus looks back on the past. His whole life is summed up in a single thing: the glorification of his Father and the progressive glorification of humanity. The reason for his coming was to bring life in its fullness, to infuse divine life into the very fabric of the daily existence of men and women.

This long prayer spoken by Jesus a few hours before his death takes on a new and special meaning when read between Ascension and Pentecost. The Fourth Gospel leads us to see that the Paschal Mystery of Christ has enduring significance for the Church of all ages. The Spirit continues, in the passion of humanity and the Church, the role he played in the Passion of Christ. He becomes the 'Paraclete', the advocate, the defender, who reveals how God's plan of salvation for humanity is to be realised.

Peter's letter, from which the second reading we have heard is taken, was written at a time when Christians were being persecuted. Peter reminds them that if they are suffering because they are Christians, they should rejoice in this, for two reasons. Firstly, because in this

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way they share in the sufferings of Christ, and secondly, because this will enable them to be filled with joy and gladness on the day when the glory of Christ is revealed. The Acts of the Martyrs of the early Church provide us with numerous examples of men and women who went joyfully to their deaths out of fidelity to Christ. Where on earth did they draw their strength and courage from?

They drew this courage and strength from their faith in Christ, of course, but from a faith shared within the Church. It was their belonging to a community of believers that gave this strength to their faith. And this community of believers found its unity and cohesion in prayer. The text of the Acts of the Apostles shows us the early community in prayer with the Apostles and around Mary. Is this not the most essential dimension of the Church?

Easter joy is a realistic joy. It is not the naïve enthusiasm of spring that forgets the winter. Often, during Eastertide, the Liturgy of the Word reminds us of the difficulties of the human condition – a human condition which, alas, continues to choose death over life; as if natural tragedies, such as the pandemic that periodically afflict humanity, were not enough. The tragedy of the war that periodically affect various parts of the world is there to make us aware of this. Even during Easter, Good Friday continues. Death on the cross remains ever-present, but as an opening onto life, a life that must be chosen, a victory that can only be achieved in and through love.

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