

# Easter 5



## Prayer of the Day

O God, form the minds of your faithful people into a single will. Make us love what you command and desire what you promise, that, amid all the changes of this world, our hearts may be fixed where true joy is found; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

## Acts 11:1-18

{1} Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. {2} So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, {3} saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" {4} Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, {5} "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. {6} As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. {7} I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' {8} But I replied, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' {9} But a second time the voice answered from heaven, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.' {10} This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. {11} At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. {12} The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. {13} He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; {14} he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.' {15} And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. {16} And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' {17} If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?" {18} When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, "Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life."

"This section is a redactional repetition [of chapter 10]." [1] This is not a terribly profound observation, but it is important because, while the conversion of the first Gentile converts to Christianity is not the subject of the pericope, it is still the subject of the passage.

2. *the circumcised believers*: "...not a group, but the whole Jerusalem congregation...."

[2]

*Why did you...eat with them*: Eating with someone indicated acceptance and approval, and it results in baptizing them! Here Peter is accused of eating with Gentiles, the same issue that drove a wedge between him and Paul in Antioch (Galatians 2:12 ff.). The question was very complicated and changed with time and place and the people involved, but the fundamental issue for the early church was "must one become a Jew, be circumcised and keep the law, in order to become a member of the Christian community?" The earlier question, "can one who is a Jew become a member of the community of believers," was already settled. And the later question, "can one remain a Jew if (s)he believes that Jesus is the Messiah," was yet to be asked.

5-16: Peter describes his experience of being called to Caesarea Martima, and what happened there.

15. *as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning*: The anointing with the Holy Spirit is not a consequence of baptism or the

laying on of hands, nor of conversion to Judaism. It occurs spontaneously at the beginning of Peter's instruction.

17: The principle upon which the Gentiles are received is that God had given them the gift of the Holy Spirit, and Peter had no right to "hinder God."

18. *they praised God*: "They" are the "circumcised believers." However, the situation of Christian non-Jews was not yet clear. The "circumcised believers next insisted that, having received the Holy Spirit, they must receive circumcision (Acts 15:5, "...some of the believers...said, "It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses.").

## **Psalm 148**

{1} Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights! {2} Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host! {3} Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars! {4} Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! {5} Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created. {6} He established them forever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed. {7} Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, {8} fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command! {9} Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! {10} Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds! {11} Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! {12} Young men and women alike, old and young together! {13} Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven. {14} He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to him. Praise the LORD!

1. *Praise the Lord*: The verb "praise" (*hallelu* in Hebrew) is repeated twelve times in the Psalm.

4. *waters above the heavens*: See Genesis 1:6-7.

5-6. *for he commanded and they were created*: The creation of the heavens and its creatures is described.

7-12: The inhabitants of the earth, from fire and hail to sea monsters, kings and peoples are listed. The "deeps" in verse 7 are the counterpart to the "waters above the heavens" in verse 4.

13. *his glory is above earth and heaven*: And heaven (verses 1-6) and earth (7-12) are called to praise him. "...the whole stock and store of the world is taken up ;and called and placed into the service of the praise of the God of Israel." [3]

14. *He has raised up a horn for his people*: A symbol of victory and prosperity (see Psalm 75:4-5).

## **Revelation 21:1-6**

{1} Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. {2} And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. {3} And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; {4} he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." {5} And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." {6} Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

1. *a new heaven and a new earth*: The created order had been swept away, and now it is not just renewed but "new," and different. Remember the alternative first lesson for Easter Sunday, Isaiah 65:17-25 in which Yahweh also promised a new heavens and a new earth.

*the first heaven and the first earth*: The first earth is the earth of the creation in Genesis.

The first heaven is heaven as it was (and is) prior to the passing away of the first heaven and earth. *Both* heaven and earth will be new.

*the sea was no more*: This “point[s] not wholly to any Semitic horror of the sea in itself, but in some degree perhaps unconsciously to its mythological connection with the Babylonian myth of the Creation, in which the sea is the water monster Tiamat, the special opponent of the gods. The omission of the sea by John may thus be owing to its evil associations....”[4]

3. *the home of God is among mortals*: God is no longer separated from his people, but he lives with them.

*He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them*: The covenant formula from the Old Testament is used to indicate that the covenant relationship that was intended has now been, but which failed repeatedly, will now become real.

4. *Death will be no more...the first things have passed away*:: The effects of the sin of Adam and Eve will be undone. Death will be uncreated. And the accompaniments of death, pain, mourning and tears will also be ended.

5. *See, I am making all things new*: This is the fulfillment of the promises of newness that have been made for a long time: a new covenant, new tongues, a new commandment, new life, a new creation, new humanity.

6. *It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end*: It is finished! All that needs to be done has been done, and all that remains is to enter the new creation. The Alpha and the Omega is the Lord God (Revelation 1:8).

### **John 13:31-35**

{31} When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. {32} If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. {33} Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' {34} I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. {35} By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

31. *When he had gone out*: "He" is Judas to whom Jesus gave a piece of bread dipped in the dish. Satan had entered him then, and Jesus said "Do quickly what you are going to do," So Judas left the supper.

31. *God has been glorified in him*: Brown offers four possible ways to understand this statement, and opts for the last: a) "Through Jesus God is held in honor by men." b) "God is honored by Jesus." c) God has won honor for Himself in Jesus." d) "God has revealed his glory in Jesus." [4]

32. *God...will glorify him at once*: The first clause is omitted by the oldest manuscripts. Brown suggests that it may be easier to explain its omission than its inclusion. [5] The way to the cross is the way of Jesus' glory, and he has now entered on that way.

34. *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another*: This commandment (*mandatum*) gives us the name for Maundy Thursday. Jesus offers a more profound reason to love than obedience to the law, that is, to show the world that they are Jesus' disciples by the Jesus-like love they have for each other.

35. *By this everyone will know*: In 197 c.e. Tertullian wrote, "The heathen are wont to exclaim with wonder, See how these Christians love one another! For they [the heathen] hate one another; and how ready they are to die for one another! For they are more ready to kill one another...." [7]

## Reflection

In a surprising twist non-Jews receive the Holy Spirit, and are affirmed, first by Peter, and then by the Christian community in Jerusalem. Though God is changeless, much in our lives and expectations must change.

"Eternal life is traditionally pictured as so otherworldly as to have no place for earth. Yet here there is a new earth. This means we need to take the earth very seriously. It is not only God's good creation but, in a totally renewed fashion, it has a place in God's eternal plans.... The words of Jesus here in John's vision ["It is done." (21:6)] repeat Jesus' words on the cross, 'It is finished'—words to be found only in the Gospel of John.... We stand between the first 'It is finished' and the second. Our tendency is to be satisfied with the first. John reminds us that there is still much more to come." [8]

At the center of the Christian life Jesus places his new commandment, "Love one another." Though love is central to Christian life, it is not easily put into practice. Paul tells us that the commandments are summed up in this, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Romans 13:9). John admonishes us that "Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen." Jesus urges us to love our enemies and notes that even the unrighteous love those who love them. Loving one another is evidence of the in-breaking of the new heavens and earth. We must be changed, or perish.

"Make us love what you command [our love]...that amid all the changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joy is found."

## Hymns [9]

*With One Voice* (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

135 --E--The Strife is	331 --II--Jerusalem, My
419 --D--Lord of All	Happy
210 --D--At the Lamb's	674v --II--Alleluia! Jesus
379 --I--Spread, Oh, Spread,	664v --G--A New
838s --P--Sing Alleluia forth	Commandment
in	337, 348, 148
330 --II--In Heaven Above	

## Prayers of the People [10]

P or A: Called through the waters of baptism to be children of God in Christ's new creation, we joyfully pray "Christ is risen!" and respond "Christ is risen indeed!"

A: Heavenly Father, through the death and resurrection of your Son and by the power of your Spirit, you have invited people of every race and background to be one. Let your church be a community of believers undivided by the variety of appearances and experiences with which we have been blessed. Christ is risen! Christ...

A: God of creation, you have made a world of beauty and mystery and have called human beings to be its stewards. Encourage us to care for your world and abandon wasteful and destructive ways, so that we and all creation might praise your name. Christ is risen! Christ...

A: God of new life, we look to the life of the world to come with hope-- where tears are wiped away and death is no more. Teach us to share this hope with others in a way that

reflects your grace and love. Christ is risen! Christ...

A: God of the sick and the dying, we pray that you comfort all who suffer from illness. We pray especially for \_\_\_\_\_. Christ is risen! Christ...

A: God of love, your Son commanded us to love one another as he loved us. May this congregation be known for its love, both among its members, and as it is shown to others. Christ is risen! Christ.

P: Into your hands we commend all for which we pray, trusting your promise to hear our prayers. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Or [11]**

*Presider or deacon*

Baptized with the Holy Spirit, let us offer prayers for all those God loves.

*Deacon or other leader*

For the whole world and all the churches of God.

For this holy gathering and our sacrifice of praise.

For *NN* and all the baptized whose faces shine with the light of Christ.

For all who minister and for all the holy people of God.

For all nations, peoples, tribes, clans, and families.

For all those in danger and need: the sick and the suffering, prisoners, captives, and their families, the hungry, homeless, and oppressed.

For the dying and the dead.

For ourselves, our families, and those we love.

Remembering our most glorious and blessed Virgin Mary, *N*, and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ.

**To you, O Lord.**

*Presider*

Blessed are you, God of glory, who gave us your Son. Hear the prayers we offer this day, come among your people, and wipe away every tear from their eyes. Glory to you for ever and ever.

**Notes**

[1] Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987, p. 85.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 86.

[3] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989, p. 562.

[4] R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*: Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920, vol. 2, p. 205.

[5] Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (xiii-xxi): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1970, p. 606. Ernst Haenchen would accept the clause as original (*John 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 7-21*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, p. 117.

[6] Brown, *Loc. cit.*

[7] *Apology*, 39.

[8] Catherine Gunsalus González, "The Fullness of Easter," *Quarterly Review* 20(2000)436-437.

[9] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rc1c0001.txt>

[10] [http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter\\_c.txt](http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_c.txt)

[11] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>