

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson

7th May 2023 - 5th Sunday of Easter

Readings (Year A): 1st: Acts 6:1-7. 2nd: 1 Peter 2:4-9. Gospel: John 14:1-12

Today the Gospel brings us to the feet of the Lord, as his guests and listeners in the Upper Room at the Last Supper. In addressing his disciples there, he is really addressing us - all those who are “waiting in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ”, all those who await the coming of the Spirit with a sense of expectancy, trust and perseverance.

Having on so many occasions preached on this gospel, and its great message of comfort and assurance of Jesus preparing a place for us, our 2nd reading is very rich with Old Testament texts which bear on our confession of Jesus and our knowledge of the Church. Let us reflect on those today.

This reading could be seen as a description of the nature or *vocation* of the **Church** – how to be Christ together in today’s world.

As the liturgy approaches Pentecost, it discretely and gradually shifts attention from the historic figure of Christ to the presence of Christ in his spiritual Body, the Church.

This movement towards “the Church as Christ in the present world” is vital. The time of the early Church was one of great ferment and growth. The speed of the development often clashed with the need to maintain the purity of vision.

It is possible that the 1st letter of St Peter is loosely based on a baptism homily, when the main concern of the preacher would be what it meant to belong to the Church. In baptism we are chosen by God, but what does this mean? It means that we are chosen to be like Jesus himself. He was rejected but was to be the cornerstone.

Similarly, we may be rejected by the world, an all too common experience for the early Christians, and also for very many Christians today.

But if we set ourselves close to Jesus, we shall be a holy priesthood (people) of living stones, and whose task will be to sing the praises of God who called us out of darkness into his own wonderful light.

The first reading from Acts and the gospel elaborate this choice still further.

The Christian is viewed as a stone which is to become part of the spiritual building erected to offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Christ.

The dignity of the Christian community is described in terms of four honorific titles of the Old Testament people of Israel

“**chosen race**”: highlights God’s choice rather than our efforts:

“**royal priesthood**” suggests that the community is dedicated to its King and that the manner of living is as much praise of God as is the public worship of the group:

the title “**Holy Nation**” and “**God’s own people**” were first applied to Israel when God established his covenant with the people through Moses.

Before their Baptism, the community was separated geographically into the regions of Pontus, Galatia etc. with the accompanying diversity of race, nation, culture and religion further estranging them.

But now, as symbolised by Christian baptism these diverse peoples have been united as God’s people. Further as the election of Israel was not an ordination to a state of excellence but rather a responsibility to

draw other nations to the worship of God, so Peter's Christians are appointed to proclaim God's mighty acts of salvation.

Through Baptism diverse peoples have been united as God's people. The Universal Church today remains in different stages in different places.

In Europe and the West there is a general shortage of vocations with a strong attack on religion, esp. Christianity from a secularist perspective.

Yet despite a decrease in numbers attending regular Sunday Mass, there is an overall increase in lay participation in church life.

This very much is the vision we have here in turning our building of stones into living stones, by God appointed.

In the days of the Acts there was concern to take on practical matters. It is such today. So many issues confront us.

Building up the body of Christ in every way is as vital as ever it was.

Christ, our sure foundation, our cornerstone, on which we build, our hope, and it is Jesus risen who sends us out to proclaim God's mighty acts of redemption and salvation.

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