

Notes on the readings for Easter 7.

The readings this Sunday are set in the time between the Ascension and Pentecost as the disciples wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit and reflect on all that has occurred.

Old Testament: Acts 1: 15-17; 21-26

This reading opens as Peter raises the question of Judas' replacement, in order to bring the number of disciples up to twelve, representing the 12 tribes of Israel. In passing we should note how it is possible for a person to be an intimate part of something, and yet not to have wholeheartedly given his allegiance to Jesus, but always hold something back. Christ wants both our intellectual devotion and our emotional commitment to him. Arising out of Judas' treacherous action, Peter sets in motion the election of a replacement. It is clear that Jesus attracted a number of followers who journeyed with the twelve during his ministry, and a choice was to be made out of this number, as he would be able to fulfil the role of an apostle, having witnessed the resurrection, and could witness to all that Jesus had done. The choice was made by election, praying that it would be guided by the Lord. Matthias was chosen, whose feast day is kept on 14th May.

Epistle: 1 John 5: 9-13

St John's first Epistle seeks to emphasise belief and love, centred on the person of Jesus. The writer seeks to build up the Christian life of believers and to encourage their faith and hope. He goes on to say that it is only through the Spirit that we can recognise Jesus as the Christ. Someone was once asked how many he had converted to faith? He replied: "None; but the Holy Spirit, many!" It is only through hearing the inner voice of the Spirit that we can know Jesus as our Saviour. Those who are deaf to the Spirit cannot know God and their lives are impoverished. John is seeking to encourage the Church to show the marks of Christ's love in practical ways.

Gospel: John 17: 6-19

This passage is taken from the centre of what has been called the 'high-priestly prayer', when Jesus prays for his disciples as he prepares to leave them. They have heard his teaching and seen his example but, as yet, don't understand the implication of this. Jesus prays that the disciples may be protected from worldly values, and maintain their fellowship in unity and joy (vv11,13). Jesus underlines that the Church must remain involved in society, yet displaying a commitment to Jesus and to God, and demonstrating godly living (v18). The passage ends with Jesus dedicating himself to God's will and purpose (v19). To be able to fulfil their calling, the disciples will need the guidance of the Holy Spirit to 'sanctify them in the truth' (v17).