



Sixth Sunday of Easter
† Sunday 21st May 2017

Cycle of Prayer: New Members of the Church
Keynote: The Spirit of Truth at work in the midst of the Church

Acts of the Apostles 8: 5-8, 14-17

Luke continues to narrate the events in the early Christian communities and we hear how the good news reaches Samaria. *‘Philip went to a Samaritan town and proclaimed the Christ to them. The people united in welcoming the message Philip preached, either because they had heard of the miracles he worked or because they saw them for themselves... as a result there was great rejoicing in that town.’* Then Luke records how new communities are bonded to the Church by a visitation of delegates from the mother church. *‘When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them... and prayed for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit... then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.’*

Responsorial Psalm 65 (66) – All the people sing a psalm of thanksgiving

First Letter of Peter 3: 15-18

‘Reverence the Lord Christ in your hearts, and always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have. But give it with courtesy and respect and with a clear conscience, so that those who slander you when you are living a good life in Christ may be proved wrong in the accusations that they bring.’ Exhorting the Christian disciple who may be in danger of social alienation, or who may feel under pressure from the surrounding pagans, non-believers, or today, our secular society – the apostle urges them to remain faithful. *‘It is better,’* says Peter, *‘to suffer for doing right than for doing wrong. Why, Christ himself, innocent though he was, had died once for sins, died for the guilty, to lead us to God. In the body he was put to death, in the spirit he was raised to life.’*

Gospel according to John 14: 15-21

The reading this Sunday continues with the words of Jesus recorded by the apostle John and known as the ‘Last Supper’ discourse. Jesus said to the disciples, *‘If you love me you will keep my commandments. I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you for ever, that Spirit of truth whom the world can never receive since it neither sees nor knows him; but you know him, because he is with you, he is in you.’* Jesus warns them he is going away but he says, *‘I will not leave you as orphans; I will come back to you. In a short time the world will no longer see me; but you will see me, because I live and you will live. On that day you will understand that I am in the Father and you in me and I in you.’* There is support here for every Christian beset with difficulties of faith or the troubles of life. For within – unrecognised by the world – but known to the believer there resides the permanent presence of God – the Spirit who befriends, advises, and gives the constant strength of God’s indwelling presence. We do indeed have good reason to take courage and to rejoice in the presence of the Spirit at work in the midst of us.

© Peter J Harrison 2017

Note: In England and Wales the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord is celebrated next Sunday.