

Season of EASTER



Prayers

Collect of the Day

O God, You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Psalm 146 (antiphon v. 2)

Acts 6:1-9; 7:2a, 51-60

1 Peter 2:2-10

John 14:1-14

Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 633

Other Hymns – 517 st. 1, 7, 3
(FR), 584 (E), 526 (G), 829 (G)

As newborn infants who long for the pure spiritual milk, so let us come before the Lord seeking His mercy with confidence that His grace will be sufficient for all our needs.

Almighty Father, everlasting God, Your Son has revealed You to us as a merciful Lord. Give to us Your Holy Spirit, that we may believe in Him whom You have sent and do the greater works He has told us we will do in His name. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, You have promised to build up Your Church to be a holy priesthood, that Your people might offer the spiritual sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving acceptable to You. Bless all pastors who proclaim Christ to us. Bless all church workers and those preparing for full-time church vocations, that Your Church may be supplied with faithful leaders and servants of Your Word. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy God, Your power brought all things into being and still You preserve what You have made. Bless our king, our prime minister, the parliament, our premier, and all elected and appointed civil servants so that they may honour You and Your purpose, establish order and justice, encourage virtue and protect all life. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O merciful Father, You have compassion upon the sick and those in need and have promised not to ignore them in their afflictions. Bless the sick with healing, those who suffer with strength and patience, and the dying with peace. Hear us especially for [_____]. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

cont'd on next page

Gracious God, You have established the home and blessed those who show us Your love. Bless all mothers and the children in their care. Bless all families and make their homes places of blessing and love, where Your Word is spoken, forgiveness reigns, and love is displayed. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have given us the wisdom of faith that through the Spirit we might know Your Son to be the way, the truth and the life. Bless all those who teach and all who learn, that the goal of our knowledge may be to know Christ and to make Him known. Do not let Your Word be bound, but let it have free course among us. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We praise You, O God, for Your goodness in hearing the prayers of Your people and granting us confidence to approach Your throne of mercy. Hear us now in the name of and for the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our risen Lord, through whom, with whom and in whom, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honour and glory is Yours, almighty Father, both now and forevermore. **Amen.**



EASTER SERMON

**FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
(Series A)**

Sermon Text: John 14:1-14

“Jesus Comforts Troubled Hearts”

“Change and decay all around I see, O Thou who changest not, abide with me.” So we sing in the fourth verse of that most comforting hymn, *Abide with Me*. That is a hymn that is often sung at a funeral; and today’s Gospel Reading from the 14th chapter of St. John’s Gospel is often read at a funeral service. And fittingly so, for a funeral is a time when people need comfort, and are looking for comfort and stability in their lives as they prepare to move forward. Death has happened. Where do we go from here? Nothing will be the same. Everything has changed, and it is not going to be easy. ‘Be with me, Jesus. Get me through this.’ Yes, “O Thou who changest not, abide with me.”

“Change and decay all around I see.” And it is not like our funeral experience when our loved ones die is unique to us alone. No, death has been an ongoing, steady, constant thing since that day that Adam and Eve fell into sin—yes, fell into death. Just look at the appointed Scripture Readings for today: none of them fun, none of them easy, all hard and sad, and very troubling.

In the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, we heard the account of the martyrdom of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, and certainly not the last. Then we heard from St. Peter’s First Letter where he tells us that Christians are the people of God; and, as such, no longer people of this world. Your hope, your life, your all is in Christ, the Cornerstone; and nowhere else. Those who reject Christ are doomed, but those who believe are built on the Cornerstone—Christ Jesus, the one true and only solid foundation. And, as such, thus fixing our hearts on the things of Jesus.

So, now we get to the Gospel Reading from St. John, kind of where we started and where we want to be. These last weeks of the Easter season are leading us up to the ascension of our Lord. Jesus and the disciples are together on the night in which He was betrayed; but the betrayal has not yet. They had just had the Last Supper, the Lord’s Supper instituted and given to the Church for all times. Jesus is teaching His disciples these final things before He was arrested

and crucified, preparing them for what was to come, comforting them before it happened—His death and then His ascension, when He would leave them and they would be left alone.

Now, we hear those words that we need to hear at every Christian funeral, and every time when trouble draws near, when faith is tested, and death is at hand. “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me. In My Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am.”

This is it. This is Jesus’ response to every prayer we pray and every prayer that we sing: ‘Abide with me’ . . . ‘Be present at our table Lord’ . . . ‘Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask Thee to stay, close by me forever’ . . . and every other hymn and prayer in times of need: when the shadows of night are upon us, when trouble is in the air, when death is at hand. And do you know what? Jesus has prepared a place for us, a place for you; and He is going to come and take you to be with Him forever, to comfort you, to care for you—keeping danger and sadness, trouble and doom and gloom, sin and death away from you. Come to defeat your foes and give you true joy and real life. That is why we love reading, and want to hear again and again those words of Jesus; for they alone bring comfort in the face of struggle. And because things change quickly in this world and in our lives, to hold on to anything worldly will lead to disappointment; after all, ‘Change and decay all around I see.’

Now, the purpose of this discourse of Jesus is given in the opening words: “Do not let your hearts be troubled,” and again in the closing words: “Be of good cheer.” The Lord Jesus does not expect His disciples to be free from troubles while they are on earth. “In the world you will have tribulation,” He says; in fact, “many tribulations,” as St. Paul would later put it.

Jesus Himself was often troubled in spirit and soul. He could have pity, could sympathize, could weep—and He did. He is still touched with the feelings of our infirmities. The disciples’ hearts were troubled, too, often troubled. Sins, after all, will trouble one’s heart. The flesh will trouble it. Satan will trouble it. The disciples were not spared these troubles. But what was more troubling was what Jesus said about the nature of His leaving—a hard journey by way of denial, passion, death, and to the day of His resurrection and victory. To be sure, the disciples would come to be comforted in this, but not yet; there were a few things that still had to happen.

This was the purpose of Jesus’ going away—to prepare a place for His disciples, His followers, His Church. Gethsemane, Caiaphas’ palace, Pilate’s court, Golgotha, were some of the milestones along the way. His going away meant to drink the cup of sorrow to its bitter dregs, for the Shepherd to lay down His life for His sheep. And then He would go to the Father to prepare a place in the Father’s house for all who will receive Him as their Saviour from sin, Satan, death, and hell. Having made all preparations for the future and eternal welfare of His believers in the heavenly mansions, the Father’s house; Jesus will not, however, leave them on their own to find that way to His father and, now, their Father.

To be sure, Jesus was leaving; and things were going to change. He calms their troubled hearts by teaching them to look beyond this life to that place that He has prepared for them. “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” He says, the way to true joy and to true life. And it is His glorious death and resurrection which secures for us the joys that go far beyond all of the joys and changeable things of this world. This is where our hearts should be fixed—to none other

than Jesus Himself. There is, after all, a certain security here, that all things are in Christ. Where He is, the Father is. “Ask anything in My name” is part of that security. Everything around us is constantly changing, nothing is secure—not even life, as we heard concerning the martyrdom of St. Stephen in the First Reading from the Book of Acts. Only one thing is changeless, one thing is secure—our crucified and risen Christ, who says again, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” ‘I will prepare a place for you that is permanent, that does not change, that is secure.’ And do you know what? It is there that the people of God from all times and places will gather. There, family is together—in those rooms in the Father’s house. And not just on Easter, or an anniversary, or Mother’s Day, and the like; but forever and ever, and never to be scattered or parted again.

That’s it. It is all about Jesus. Jesus for you. Jesus preparing an eternal home for you. Jesus suffering, dying, rising, and ascending for you. Jesus coming for you to take you from this veil of tears and suffering and heartache to be with Him. On the Last Day, the Lord resurrecting your renewed body from the grave, to live upon the new earth, paradise restored! God grant that our hearts be fixed on Jesus, our only hope, the Cornerstone, the Way to true joy and real life. And to that end we pray: ‘Change and decay all around I see, O Thou who changest not, abide with me.’ Amen.