

The Lectionary with Vicar

The appointed readings for this upcoming Sunday are taken from Acts 6:1-9; 7:2a, 51-60; I Peter 2:2-10; and John 14:1-14. I encourage you to open your Bibles and read through these passages with me.

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

Today we read the story of Stephen. I would like to focus on the second half of the reading (7:51-60). In it, Stephen talks about unbelievers, and then we can see the reaction of those unbelievers to Stephen's message, as Stephen is put to death. Stephen's death shows a contrast to the reaction of unbelievers, as Stephen forgives his killers and places his trust in God.

This passage tells us about those who disbelieve the message of the Gospel. In verse 51, Stephen puts the blame securely on the unbeliever as one who resists the Holy Spirit. These people are continually resisting God's Word every time it is preached to them, first through the prophets, then through Christ himself, and finally through Stephen, whom they again reject. Stephen characterizes them as continually rejecting God's revelation, whether it comes from men, from the angels, or directly from God's Son.

Compared to this we see Stephen who lives his life in imitation of Christ. Pay attention to the two phrases Stephen says as he is dying: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And "Lord do not hold this sin against them." These phrases sound very similar to the words Luke records in his earlier book, "Father into your hands, I commit my spirit!" and "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Compared to the unbelievers, Stephen dies looking at Christ and acting like Him. While the unbelievers are focused on what Stephen is saying about them, Stephen, even while being stoned is focused only on Christ, and living a life that imitates Him, even to the point of death.

I Peter 2:1-10

Peter continues his letter with a description of what the Christian life should look like. He describes the new community that is made by the church, and like our first reading, Peter here contrasts the believers and the unbelievers. The main portion of the letter describes Christians with two different metaphors: a living stone that is part of a spiritual house, and a member of a holy nation of priests. He concludes the section with what makes the believers these living stones and holy priests: mercy.

The first metaphor Peter uses is that of living stones making up a spiritual house. Here Peter notes a number of things. We are not just living stones, but stones rejected by men and chosen by God – in this way our lives also imitate Christ as we are made members of His church. Our lives are founded on Christ as the cornerstone, as such the house that we are built into is secure. In writing this, Peter also describes unbelievers as those who stumble over Jesus the stone. The stone on which we are built is the same stone that is an obstacle for all who believe.

But we are also a nation of priests. In this metaphor are a few different concepts. The first is that we are chosen. This goes to show that we are part of this special group not because of anything that we have done, but solely based on God's mercy and choice. Second, we are priests. The duty of a priest was to act as a go between God and men. All Christians are called to be God's priests for the world as we share the Gospel with others. Third we are holy, or "set apart." God has a special purpose for us, ending in the new creation.

John 14:1-14

Finally, in our Gospel reading, we read the Words of Jesus from the Last Supper. In this short passage Jesus tells His disciples three things, two about Himself, and one about Jesus' followers. He tells them first that He is the Way. Second of all, He tells them that He is the one who reveals the Father. Finally, Jesus tells His disciples that they will do powerful works in the name of Christ, just as Christ acted in the name of the Father.

Jesus is the Way and He reveals the Father to all who follow Him. Jesus came to us to bring us to the Father, we did not seek Him out, but it was only through His mercy and grace that He came to us. Jesus makes it clear that everyone is invited to know the Father, but only through Christ. Those who stubbornly keep trying to know the Father by other paths, whether through their own study, different Scriptures, or some kind of meditation, will never be able to find Him, but those who are passively brought by Christ into God's presence will know Him and see Him. Just as in our first reading, for those who stubbornly resist, God, the blame lays securely on them for rejecting the way that was freely offered. For those who are saved, as mentioned in our second reading, it is only through God's mercy that He sent His Son to reveal Himself to us.

And if Jesus is the way, we will live our life in His name. This means that we will do it according to His will. It means that we will do everything for His glory. And it means that we will live our lives as imitations of Christ. Jesus even says, those who live their lives in His name will do greater works than Christ, but only because Christ Himself will be working in them and through them. Just as we know Jesus was God's Son because He did His works in the Father's name, people will know that we are Jesus disciples because we do our works in His name.

A Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, You are the Way, the Truth, and the Life, only through You can I know the Father. Help me to live my life in imitation of You, whatever may befall me. Let all of my deeds be done in Your name, that others may see You through the works that I do. Finally, Lord, bring me through You into the blessed comfort of heaven and into the New Creation, that I may always know You and the Father. In Your name I pray, Amen.