

5TH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Lectionary #54

READING I Acts 14:21–27

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

After **Paul** and **Barnabas** had proclaimed the good news to that city

and made a considerable number of **disciples**, they returned to **Lystra** and to **Iconium** and to **Antioch**.

They strengthened the **spirits** of the disciples and **exhorted** them to **persevere** in the **faith**, saying, “It is **necessary** for us to undergo many **hardships** to enter the kingdom of **God**.”

They appointed **elders** for them in each **church** and, with **prayer** and **fasting**, commended them to the **Lord** in whom they had put their **faith**.

Then they traveled through **Pisidia** and reached **Pamphylia**. After proclaiming the word at **Perga** they went down to **Attalia**.

From there they sailed to **Antioch**, where they had been commended to the grace of **God** for the **work** they had now **accomplished**.

And when they **arrived**, they called the church **together** and **reported** what God had **done** with them and how he had opened the door of **faith** to the **Gentiles**.

This is the fifth of eight consecutive weeks we read from Acts.

“That city” is Derbe. Don’t rush the names and stress the missionary effort.

Iconium = ĩ-KOH-nee-uhm
Antioch = AN-tee-ahk

Stress their effort to reassure the struggling community. Remember that they *know* what it means to suffer for the faith.

There are three actions here: 1) they appointed elders, 2) they prayed and fasted, and 3) they commended them to God.

Pisidia = pih-SID-ee-uh
Pamphylia = pam-FIL-ee-uh
Perga = PER-guh
Attalia = uh-TAHL-ee-uh

They were “commended,” that is, they had been “prayed” into their assignment.

They gather the community to share good news.

READING I

On the surface of this reading we have a report of the missionary activities of Paul and Barnabas. But the details express a deeper truth—a conviction that God is doing a new and mighty work through the disciples of Jesus. This work is so compelling that it spreads quickly, despite opposition, throughout the Greco-Roman world. Knowing something about the cities mentioned will help you speak of them familiarly. Try “visiting” these towns by referring to a map (found in most Bibles) of Paul’s

missionary journeys, noting the geographical relationship of the cities and the part of Asia they occupied. Paul and Barnabas have been to Lystra before: Paul healed a crippled man there. The people at first wanted to worship him, but as if to prove that no good deed goes unpunished, the healing was used against him by opponents and he was stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:8–20). Now, amazingly, Paul returns to this city where he nearly lost his life to monitor the growth of his recent converts. So when he exhorts the disciples that “It is necessary for us to undergo many

hardships to enter the kingdom of God” he is speaking from hard experience. One who has come so close to martyrdom can speak convincingly of the need “to persevere” in the face of opposition.

Throughout the Easter season we reflect on the spread of the Gospel. This list of cities must be read (joyfully!) with awareness that God’s will was accomplished in these towns through the work (preaching and the appointing of elders) and suffering of the early missionaries. If you had recently returned from a successful peace mission to the Middle East, with

This is the fourth of six consecutive weeks we read from Revelation. "See" the vision as John sees it. Don't rush; persuade us that what you describe is possible.

"Sea" is an archetypal symbol of chaos and death.

Read these lines slowly; this is gorgeous poetry.

The excitement builds. The "voice from the throne" speaks with majesty and authority.

Speak more softly here. Make eye contact with the assembly and give this a very personal quality.

Speak strongly again here. This is the promise of Easter. Announce it with conviction.

READING II Revelation 21:1–5a

A reading from the Book of Revelation

Then I, John, saw a **new** heaven and a new **earth**.

The **former** heaven and the former **earth** had passed **away**, and the **sea** was no **more**.

I also saw the holy **city**, a new **Jerusalem**, coming down out of **heaven** from **God**, prepared as a **bride** adorned for her **husband**.

I heard a loud **voice** from the throne saying, "**Behold**, God's **dwelling** is with the human **race**."

He will **dwell** with them and they will be his **people** and God **himself** will **always** be with them as their **God**.

He will wipe every **tear** from their **eyes**, and there shall be no more **death** or **mourning**, **wailing** or **pain**, for the **old** order has passed **away**."

The One who sat on the **throne** said, "**Behold**, I make **all** things **new**."

what kind of energy would you report that news to anxious ears back home?

READING II The faithful reading of scripture can render any situation tolerable, for the truths we encounter in its pages foster joyful faith and confident hope, even in people facing grief or crisis. Today's reading is a sample of "apocalyptic" literature written especially to bolster the faith of people living through hard times. But one need not be facing crisis to appreciate it. The key word

in this text is a word overused and cheapened by advertising media that ceaselessly proclaim, "New and improved!" But your belief in the impossible news of Easter morning should help you speak of the newness promised here with special meaning and conviction. John's vision is not of life beyond, but of life renewed and infused with hope here on earth. It is a message for now, not for the end. The Resurrection inaugurated a new age; the one who died and rose had lived in human flesh among us, but now through word and sacraments, God lives with us forever. Granted, what

John "sees" is not yet fully realized; tears, mourning, pain, and death are still among us, but faith helps us see God at work transforming and renewing and allows us to hope for the day when all those signs of death are gone for good.

John clothes his message in jubilant imagery: Jerusalem is a "bride adorned for her husband!" See the vision as John does, one scene at a time, as if frame after gorgeous frame of the revelation were displayed before you.

Proclaim this reading slowly. Listeners *must* hear the allusion to Judas.

Two words distinguish this text: “glorify” and “love.” Go slowly to clarify the meaning, or this will sound like gibberish.

The salutation sets the tone. Speak lovingly.

Stress “I” and “you” so we hear the comparison. The tone is personal and intimate, but ramifications are universal.

GOSPEL John 13:31–33a, 34–35

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

When **Judas** had left them, **Jesus** said,
 “**Now** is the Son of Man glorified, and **God** is glorified in him.
 If God is glorified in him,
 God will **also** glorify him in **himself**,
 and God will glorify him at **once**.
 My **children**, I will be with you only a little while **longer**.
 I give you a **new** commandment: **love** one another.
 As **I** have loved **you**, so you **also** should love one **another**.
 This is how all will **know** that you are my **disciples**,
 if you have **love** for one another.”

GOSPEL

Why does mention of Judas open a Gospel of the Easter season? Set in the context of the Last Supper, this soliloquy anticipates Jesus’ final glorification which Judas’ departure now sets in motion. John equates suffering and glory, for the one leads to the other, hence Judas’ ominous departure prompts Jesus’ confident assertion that he will be exalted by the Father.

The connection between the seemingly disjointed first and second halves of the reading is provided by Jesus’ injunction to “love one another.” Not really a new

commandment (compare Leviticus 19:18), Jesus, nonetheless, makes it the distinguishing sign of the new people of God. Jesus will be “glorified” not in a palace or on a regal throne, but in the love his followers share for one another. Jesus’ announcement of glorification is full of expectant hope. The news that he will remain with them “only a little while longer” is not a melancholic lament, but a promise of better things to come, for as Jesus states later in the discourse, his departure makes possible the coming of the Paraclete.

Jesus offers the hope with which he faces trial as a model for the disciples. He also offers himself as model for the love that must characterize their community. “As I have loved you . . .” reaffirms *his* love for the disciples (and us); “So you also should love . . .” challenges them (and us) to love as he does. In John, this command to love parallels the synoptics’ institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper.