

## Fifth Sunday of Easter

### Reading 1

[Acts 9:26-31](#)

When Saul arrived in Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples,  
but they were all afraid of him,  
not believing that he was a disciple.  
Then Barnabas took charge of him and brought him to the apostles,  
and he reported to them how he had seen the Lord,  
and that he had spoken to him,  
and how in Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.  
He moved about freely with them in Jerusalem,  
and spoke out boldly in the name of the Lord.  
He also spoke and debated with the Hellenists,  
but they tried to kill him.  
And when the brothers learned of this,  
they took him down to Caesarea  
and sent him on his way to Tarsus.

The church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria was at peace.  
It was being built up and walked in the fear of the Lord,  
and with the consolation of the Holy Spirit it grew in numbers

### Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 22:26-27, 28, 30, 31-32](#)

R. (26a) **I will praise you, Lord, in the assembly of your people.**

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

I will fulfill my vows before those who fear the LORD.

The lowly shall eat their fill;

they who seek the LORD shall praise him:

"May your hearts live forever!"

R. **I will praise you, Lord, in the assembly of your people.**

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

All the ends of the earth

shall remember and turn to the LORD;

all the families of the nations

shall bow down before him.

R. **I will praise you, Lord, in the assembly of your people.**

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

To him alone shall bow down

all who sleep in the earth;

before him shall bend

all who go down into the dust.

R. **I will praise you, Lord, in the assembly of your people.**

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

And to him my soul shall live;

my descendants shall serve him.

Let the coming generation be told of the LORD

that they may proclaim to a people yet to be born

the justice he has shown.

R. **I will praise you, Lord, in the assembly of your people.**

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

## **Reading II**

[1 Jn 3:18-24](#)

Children, let us love not in word or speech  
but in deed and truth.  
Now this is how we shall know that we belong to the truth  
and reassure our hearts before him  
in whatever our hearts condemn,  
for God is greater than our hearts and knows everything.  
Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us,  
we have confidence in God  
and receive from him whatever we ask,  
because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.  
And his commandment is this:  
we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ,  
and love one another just as he commanded us.  
Those who keep his commandments remain in him, and he in them,  
and the way we know that he remains in us  
is from the Spirit he gave us.

## **Gospel**

[Jn 15:1-8](#)

Jesus said to his disciples:  
"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower.  
He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit,  
and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit.  
You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you.  
Remain in me, as I remain in you.  
Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own  
unless it remains on the vine,  
so neither can you unless you remain in me.  
I am the vine, you are the branches.  
Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit,  
because without me you can do nothing.  
Anyone who does not remain in me  
will be thrown out like a branch and wither;  
people will gather them and throw them into a fire  
and they will be burned.  
If you remain in me and my words remain in you,  
ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you.  
By this is my Father glorified,  
that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."

## HOMILY

Let my words remain in you. God is like a mother. And like all mothers, they talk a lot. Good mothers talk a lot. It's their way of saying, like Christ, remain with me. Let's talk first about Jesus and his disciples; then, why mothers talk so much.

Students of John's Gospel will recognize the theme of "abiding" here. The Greek word *menein* (to abide or remain) appears eight times in this passage. The call to "abide" runs through the whole gospel. When the first disciples approached Jesus, he asked them: "Whom do you seek?" They answered with a question: "Where do you abide?" (In other words, 'Where is your abode?') He said, "Come and see."

The gospel takes off from there. If we want to know Christ we have to abide with Him. Today He might say, "Spend time with me." "Hang with me." Jesus wants his disciples to cling to him – not just for his sake – but so that their joy may be complete. Next week we will hear that Jesus offer "complete joy." It's the answer to the question, "Whom – or what – do you seek?" Today we are overwhelmed with offers of "joy." The ads on television promise us joy in many forms – from pizza with five toppings, to casinos where we are guaranteed to win big. And guys, don't forget that aftershave that will have all the pretty women chasing you! Offers of joy come from every corner. But Jesus offers "complete joy." It leads us to ask "Whom, or what, do we seek?" What will give us complete joy?

The disciples have been pruned and are grafted to the vine by the Word of God. So as Jesus clings to the Father, he hopes all the disciples will cling to him. He and the Father are one. And Jesus invites the disciples to become part of that unity by abiding in his love. We cling to Christ because of his word. Jesus is the Word of God. This is the first line of John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." The Son of God is the Word which brings us to the Father. Just as when you and I want to get to know someone we speak to the person, so too Jesus speaks so that we may come to know God. The Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – could be compared to a person speaking. The theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar described the Trinity as an act of speech. In every speech act there are three parts: the speaker, the word spoken, and the breath that animates the word. (If you're out of breath you cannot speak. And in Hebrew, the word for 'breath' and 'spirit' is the same, *ruah*.) So God the Father is the speaker, the Son is the Word, and the Spirit gives breath to the voice. We abide in God by hearing the Word and responding to it. God's Word is the glue by which we cling to Christ. . . God's Word . . .

For me it's one more example of how God is like a mother. . . Let me explain. Recently I found an essay by Dean Falk, an anthropologist at Florida State University. She explained the purpose of "baby talk," the way parents talk to their infant children. It comes from a need to reassure an infant when the mother has to leave her child. It seems that about two million years ago our brains began to grow larger. These large brains make us the most cognitively advanced species on earth. (I'm sure all those students who are taking exams now appreciate their massive brains, holding all that information.) The human brain is larger than the brain of an ape. (You never see an ape taking exams.) But this large brain created a problem for the mother. Already humans were walking on two legs. In order to support

the larger brain while she went walking and running, the skeleton had to change. For part of this change the birth canal narrowed, making the passage of big brained infants difficult. Natural selection, then, encouraged the early birth of the human fetus, before it finished gestating. For this reason, human babies are born in an immature, helpless state, compared with the apes.

The baby ape could cling to its mother's hairy chest, while she foraged for food. But the human baby didn't have the manual dexterity to cling to her. So the mother had to hold the child. But when she searched for food, she had to put the baby down, which was distressing for the infant. So it's likely, according to Prof. Falk, that mothers began to talk in a special way to their infants – lullabies and baby talk. So, while the mothers were separated from their infants, the babies knew they were not far away. They would feel secure. The mother's voice reassured them.

This way of talking to infants is found in almost all human cultures.

It reminds me that God is like a mother. In one way or another, we are separated from God. We long for God's presence – to cling to God. What connects us with God during this absence is God's word – spoken to us through Jesus Christ. Remember, too, the "Good Shepherd" from last week: the sheep know the voice of their shepherd. Isn't it similar to an infant recognizing its mother's voice?

The primitive mother needed to find a way to connect with her child, so she used her musical voice. Jesus Christ needed a way to connect with his friends, so he promised them, "Remain in me and you will bear fruit." We are like the disciples bearing good fruit for God. We spread the good news of Jesus Christ in our word and work. God speaks to us today with reassuring noises, through the Church.

We abide in Christ by reading and listening to the Scripture. We hear the Word of God spoken to us to realize God's message for our community in our time. In our celebration we respond to that Word in thanks and praise of God. And we carry out this Word with our work for others in Christ's name: bringing Communion to the sick; raising children or caring for family members; teaching in school, or campus ministry, or counseling; and those who work for the church. In our Christian work *we* talk for God, and we allow *others* to talk for God. As disciples we need to encourage this talk about God for others to realize how close God is to them, and how much Christ wants us to abide in Him. By listening, praising, and acting upon his Word – making the right noises – we abide with Christ, until that day when our joy will be complete. Amen.

*Thomas Scirghi, S.J.*