

Lesson 12

Sixth Sunday of Easter

The Holy Gospel: John 14:15–21

The Sundays of Easter have moved us closer to the end of the period of forty days during which Jesus appeared to His apostles and spoke to them about the kingdom of God. The thrust is moving toward next Thursday, when the Church will celebrate the Ascension of our Lord and then remember the waiting in Jerusalem for the promised gift from above, the baptism with the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1:3–4). Today's Holy Gospel continues our study of Jesus' farewell discourses with His disciples in the Upper Room. It is part of Jesus' promise of His continuing presence with them and in them through the Holy Spirit. We rejoice to know that His promise extends also to us to bless us in the same way.

"If you love Me" calls for more than the love of affection or friendship. The Greek is *agapate*. It calls for a willed, determined love in response to the willed, determined love that took Jesus to the cross for us. Its present tense calls for constancy. It might be translated, "If you make up your mind to keep on loving Me."

186. What, according to Jesus, is the evidence of such determined love for Him? (See 1 John 2:1–11; 4:19–5:5.)

187. How may we see a glimpse of the three-personed nature of God in Jesus' promise to send another Counselor?

"Counselor" is the Greek *parakletos*, which means "one called to stand beside" to encourage, to strengthen, and to defend.

188. Why did Jesus call the Counselor "the Spirit of truth"? (See John 14:25–26; 15:26; 16:12–15.)

189. Why can't "the world" see, know, and accept this Holy Spirit? (See 1 Corinthians 2:1–5, 12–14.)

190. Why did Jesus follow His "you know Him, for He dwells with you" with "and will be in you"?

Jesus was preparing the apostles for what lay ahead: His suffering and dying. He assured them He would not leave them as orphans, just on their own, but would come to them. He did this as the risen Jesus through the Counselor the Father sent them.

191. What great events lay ahead that would convince the apostles of the truth of Jesus' "I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you"?

There is a circle of blessing in our faith and life as we know Jesus and the indwelling Spirit. Motivated by the realization that Jesus, our Savior, is in the Father and in us, we make it our aim to obey His commands and show our love for Him. In turn, the Father and Jesus and the Holy Spirit love us and live in us, and we grow in the peace and hope and joy that are ours in Christ. This circle of blessing may best be appreciated when you look at its opposite—when people do not have Jesus and His Father living in them through faith in Jesus, God's commands to love Him and our neighbor are not obeyed, the Spirit of Jesus is rejected, and people spiral down into deeper unbelief, sin, and death.

192. What happens in the experience of a Christian who begins to refuse or neglect to obey the commands of Jesus?

The First Lesson: Acts 17:16–31

193. Paul "reasoned" with the Jews and the God-fearers in the synagogue. What did this always involve? He spoke also with anyone in the marketplace who would listen to him. What did he proclaim there that caused the Greeks to call him "this babblers"?

Faithful to his apostolic duties, Paul could not just sit and wait, and his aggressiveness was rewarded. He was brought to a meeting of philosophers on the Areopagus. The events that led to this opportunity, which Paul was happy to grasp, are recorded in the paragraph that precedes his speech at the Areopagus (16–21).

Christian witnesses are encouraged to meet people where they are. This establishes a common ground from which to move to a proclamation of Christ. Paul met the Athenian philosophers on the common ground of natural religion, the truths about God that are available to all. Many Greeks had intellectually rejected the crass idolatry of paganism, which deified nature and saw gods or goddesses relating to every human emotion or earthly circumstance. This is why so many Greeks were attracted to the spirituality and the higher morality of Judaism. The men of the Areopagus who listened to Paul had not become God-fearers, and Paul was not meeting them in a Jewish synagogue, but he did not lack ready ears to listen to him tell about the God they acknowledged as the Unknown God.

194. What points of natural theology did Paul present that he knew would be philosophically acceptable to his hearers?

195. How did Paul finally bring his remarks around to focus on Jesus Christ?

Paul's mentioning the resurrection of Jesus produced a mixed reaction (vv. 32–34).

196. How does this First Lesson tie in with today's Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: 1 Peter 3:13–22

Peter was writing to Christians who were under threat of persecution if they did not participate in burning incense to the emperor as a personification of the divine spirit of Rome. He urged them to stand strong in their faithfulness to Jesus and told them, “Even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed”; then he added, “Have no fear of them, nor be troubled.”

Peter suggested that we will be equipped for the needed decisiveness if in our hearts we will _____. The Greek *kurion ton Christon* is the confession that Jesus Christ is God. (*Kurios* was used in the Septuagint, the translation of the Old Testament into Greek, for “the Lord God, Yahweh.”) Its use in the New Testament for Jesus also proclaims His deity. *Hagiaste*, “set apart,” calls on us to sanctify Him, to keep Him holy in our hearts.

197. What does it mean for us in our daily living when we “in [our] hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy”?

Jesus told His apostles that they would be brought before kings and governors on account of His name and that this would result in opportunities to be His witnesses. He told them not to worry beforehand how to defend themselves because He would give them words of wisdom their adversaries would not be able to resist or contradict. But here Peter tells Christians that part of their needed decisiveness involve their “always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.”

198. How do you reconcile Jesus’ assurance about the Spirit’s giving words of wisdom and Peter’s instruction to be prepared to witness to your faith in Jesus? How can you prepare yourself to be ready to use opportunities “to make a defense” and give “a reason for the hope that is in you”?

199. Why is it important to bring your witness with gentleness and respect, especially with regard to those who may be disinterested and even antagonistic?

200. Why are we to be willing to suffer wrong as a result of our Christian witness and not think of returning evil for evil? (See Romans 12:9–21.)

This lesson includes words that are a “seat of doctrine” for the article of faith that we state in the Apostles’ Creed: “He descended into hell.” Peter said that Jesus was “made alive in the spirit, in which He went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison.” His descent into hell, then, really was the first display of the exaltation of the God-man after completing His saving work. He did not descend into hell to suffer for sin. He had done that once for all in the eternal moment on the cross when His Father turned from Him (see

Matthew 27:45–46). But He had said, “It is finished”—*tetelestai*, “paid in full.” Nor did He go to preach “a second chance” to the disobedient in hell (see Hebrews 9:27–28). It helps us to note that the Greek word for “proclaimed” is not *euangelizo*, “to preach Good News,” but *kerusso*, “to make a proclamation.” What Jesus did as the first step of His exaltation was to go into the camp of the enemy to make a proclamation of His complete and final victory!

201. How is the ark riding above the waters of the flood a symbol of Holy Baptism? What gives Baptism its saving power?