

## EASTER: IN FAITH WE CELEBRATE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

**Sixth Sunday of Easter**

**May 13, 2007**

**Acts 16:9-15**

**Psalm 67**

**Revelation 21:10, 22—22:5**

**John 14:23-29 or John 5:1-9**

### **The Spirit that Teaches and Reminds**

The Gospel reading for this week comes from the book of John, but does so at a time in the life of Jesus that requires us to jump back before his death and resurrection. In Hollywood jargon, it is somewhat of a Johannine prequel. The context of John 14:23-29 is just hours before the arrest and death of Jesus (John 18, 19). He is sharing with his disciples his parting words -- words of comfort and encouragement to continue the work he had begun.

In the midst of this intimate sharing, Jesus zeroes in on one characteristic of this work: love is to be the defining mark of their obedience and discipleship. This is not a new word. Jesus has spent much of his time coaxing his disciples to love all others, showing them what love means (John 13:1-20), and reminding them over and over that love will reveal that they are truly his disciples (John 13:35).

Then Jesus changes the subject very quickly and brings up a topic that his disciples must have been wrestling with in those closing hours. Soon, Jesus reminds them of his imminent departure (14:29). But his haunting words also come with a promise, and that is the promise of God's Spirit (14:25, 26). Just as Jesus had been with them to teach and goad them toward true discipleship, this Spirit, the Helper, the *Paraclete*, will be with them throughout their lives. In those post-resurrection/ascension days, the presence of the Spirit will do for them what Jesus' physical presence had done for them: teach them more about what it means to be a true disciple and remind them of what Jesus had said.

The promise of the Spirit becomes, then, an important turning point in the life and ministry of Jesus. It meant, among other things, that God's revelation in Jesus was about more than his brief, earthly presence. And the witness to that revelation would not be limited only to those who had lived alongside Jesus. Jesus told his disciples to tell others about him (John 15:27), and Jesus himself prayed for those who will have faith because of what his followers will say about him (John 17:20). This is the ongoing witness in faith to which we are now called, empowered by the gift of God's Spirit.

We in the Church are post-resurrection people. We depend on the promise that Jesus made to his disciples: that even after his physical time on earth has ended, we have the gift of God's Spirit to work with and through us. And this is an amazing power! This is God's Spirit, the Spirit that

hovered over creation like a hen hovers over her eggs; that empowered Moses and Miriam, Elijah, Deborah, David, Isaiah, and Ezekiel to speak clearly God's word; and that the prophet Joel promised would one day be poured out on all God's people (Joel 2:28-29).

As we near Ascension Day and Pentecost, we recall that Jesus refused to leave his disciples alone but rather assured them of God's continuing presence through the Holy Spirit (John 14:18). Let us be grateful that God's Spirit comes to us because of that promise Jesus made to his disciples. And let us be challenged to listen to that Spirit that seeks ever to teach and remind us of the love that sets us apart as true disciples of Christ.

This week's Reflection was prepared by Stephen Berneking, Ph.D., who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Senior Manager for Translations in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

+ + +

**This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Suriname** – With thanks to God for the increasing numbers visiting the Bible World exhibition and for electronic biblical resources, and with prayers for the rebuilding of the villages destroyed by floods and that the Scriptures distributed with relief aid to these areas bring many to Christ; with thanks to God for the refurbished office in **Guyana** and with prayers for the Bible Society Committee in **French Guiana; Brazil** – With thanks to God for the outstanding distribution of Scriptures during the past year and for the many social programs and projects that were developed, and with prayers for Bible work challenges, especially related to people with special needs; **Ecuador** – With prayers for the provision of Scriptures in Spanish and Quichua:Chimborazo and the ability to distribute as many copies as possible; **Peru** – With thanks to God for record numbers of Bibles distributed and for 40 Bible Houses across the country, and with prayers for the impact of the theatrical production of Mark's Gospel, for The Macedonian Call (an evangelization and discipling program for churches), for the breakfast-and-Scripture ministry to poor children, and for the literacy program for churches in Cuzco.

**Activity Corner:** A Seven-Day Prayer

Supplies needed: Bible; daily newspaper; scissors; envelope or folder.

Use Psalm 67 as a basis for family devotions throughout the week. Begin each day's devotion by reading Psalm 67 (invite a different member of your household to read the psalm each day, or gather in a circle and invite everyone to take turns reading a verse). Since the psalm has seven verses, focus especially on one verse each day (Sunday – verse 1; Monday – verse 2, etc.). Encourage members of your household to discuss how God is speaking through that verse. Invite each one to complete this sentence: "Today, God's Spirit is teaching me \_\_\_\_\_." Following the reading of the psalm, select a story from the day's newspaper that reports a situation you want to hold up in prayer. Cut out the story and place it in an envelope or folder. Conclude your prayers each day by thanking God for the gift of the Holy Spirit and for the opportunity to serve as a disciple for Jesus. At the end of the week, pray again for all the situations in the stories you have collected.