

**Opening Prayer**

**Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.**

**Acts 1:6-14**

<sup>1:6</sup> So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup> He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." <sup>9</sup> When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup> They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." <sup>12</sup> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. <sup>13</sup> When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. <sup>14</sup> All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

**Commentary**

This is Ascension Sunday, the Christian celebration that marks the return of the risen Christ to God. In the New Testament, whenever people "in white robes" appear, something is going to happen. Here there is a promise and an implied message. The promise was that Jesus would return. The disciples went back to Jerusalem, to the upper room, probably the same room where they had eaten the Passover some weeks before. There they began to get ready for the promised power. The eleven are named—Peter and the rest. But they were not the only ones there in the upper room, just as they may not have been the only ones at the Last Supper. There were the women (who had been Jesus' disciples in Galilee), his mother and brothers, and others. While they waited, they spent their time in prayer, in remembering the teachings of Jesus, and in building a sense of community among themselves.

## Reflection

When are you tempted to continue gazing heavenward when there is work to be done?

### **1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11**

<sup>4:12</sup> Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup> If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

<sup>5:6</sup> Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. <sup>7</sup> Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. <sup>8</sup> Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. <sup>9</sup> Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. <sup>10</sup> And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. <sup>11</sup> To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

## Commentary

Peter promised his church that they would be able to face the rough times that were coming. Why? Because they knew that glory and power belonged to God. Nations and emperors may think they have the ultimate power; indeed, they may have the power to persecute, even kill the faithful. But ultimate power belongs only to God. So the church can stand firm, knowing we are supported by the greatest power in the universe. The address, "beloved," reminded the church that they were loved—by Peter, who showed his love in this letter, and also by God. Verse 13 is one of the letter's great themes. Christ's suffering is the example for their suffering and the ground of their salvation. Now, given the realities in their world, they shared in Christ's suffering. Because of this they could rejoice. Later, when they would come to share in Christ's glory, they could rejoice exceedingly! Finally, 1 Peter 5:9 reminded the Christians to stand firm because they were not the only Christians who were suffering. There is a *koinonia* (community) of suffering. These Gentile Christians were caught between cultures. Some of the ethical admonitions in First Peter are rooted in Greco-Roman culture. The congregation had to live in the tension between Christian and Gentile ideals. The persecution one suffers, Peter says, includes others in the Christian community.

## Reflection

How do we talk about God in human terms? What do we say about God's rule?

## **John 17:1-11**

<sup>17:1</sup> After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, <sup>2</sup> since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. <sup>3</sup> And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. <sup>4</sup> I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup> So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. <sup>6</sup> "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. <sup>7</sup> Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; <sup>8</sup> for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. <sup>9</sup> I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. <sup>10</sup> All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. <sup>11</sup> And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

### **Commentary**

These verses are part of what is known as Jesus' high priestly prayer, included in John's Gospel where the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) have Jesus asking God to remove the cup of suffering from him. It speaks of the relationship between the Father and the Son and how it takes form in the life of the church. In Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, God would be glorified. God would be known as the Father of Jesus. The "hour," was the time when God's glory was revealed through torture, death, and resurrection. What human beings meant for a victory over one who disturbed their world turned into God's victory over sin and death.

### **Reflection**

In what seems a contradiction, Jesus was glorified through torture and death. What can this mean? What does it suggest about faith? Can this help us find meaning in our suffering?

### **Responsive Psalter**

### **Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35**

<sup>68:1</sup> Let God rise up, let his enemies be scattered;  
let those who hate him flee before him.

<sup>2</sup> **As smoke is driven away, so drive them away;  
as wax melts before the fire,  
let the wicked perish before God.**

- <sup>3</sup> But let the righteous be joyful;  
let them exult before God;  
let them be jubilant with joy.
- <sup>4</sup> **Sing to God, sing praises to his name;  
lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds—  
his name is the LORD-- be exultant before him.**
- <sup>5</sup> Father of orphans and protector of widows  
is God in his holy habitation.
- <sup>6</sup> **God gives the desolate a home to live in;  
he leads out the prisoners to prosperity,  
but the rebellious live in a parched land.**
- <sup>7</sup> O God, when you went out before your people,  
when you marched through the wilderness, *Selah*
- <sup>8</sup> **the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain  
at the presence of God, the God of Sinai,  
at the presence of God, the God of Israel.**
- <sup>9</sup> Rain in abundance, O God, you showered abroad;  
you restored your heritage when it languished;
- <sup>10</sup> **your flock found a dwelling in it;  
in your goodness, O God, you provided for the needy.**
- <sup>68:32</sup> Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth;  
sing praises to the Lord, *Selah*
- <sup>33</sup> **O rider in the heavens, the ancient heavens;  
listen, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice.**
- <sup>34</sup> Ascribe power to God,  
whose majesty is over Israel;  
and whose power is in the skies.
- <sup>35</sup> **Awesome is God in his sanctuary,  
the God of Israel;  
he gives power and strength to his people. Blessed be God!**

### Closing Prayer

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**