

Readings

Acts 9:26-31

Ps 22:26-27, 28, 30, 31-32

1 Jn 3:18-24

Jn 15:1-8

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Easter is such a “big deal” for us Christians, that the season lasts a full 50 days in our liturgical life. It begins with an “octave,” an eight-day stretch when each Mass is celebrated like the Mass of Easter Sunday. Then it continues with Alleluias generously and joyfully sounding throughout. Unlike the shallow expression of the retail marketplace, Easter is much more than can be contained in merely a 24-to-48-hour observance.

During this beautiful season, we hear many readings from the Acts of the Apostles which describe the early community of believers becoming the church. So many experiences, discoveries and growth spurts are described, all under the action and influence of the Holy Spirit. The Easter Season concludes with the great feast of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was experienced in a most memorable and effective experience compared to simultaneous flood and fire.

In a way, this series of scriptural readings remind me of intergenerational family gatherings when we would exchange memories, stories and tales among siblings and parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents. What is described about the early church is our family history. These people, Mary Magdalene, Peter, John, Paul Thomas, Stephen, Mary, the mother of Jesus, Barnabas, and others are all our ancestors in the faith.

Today we hear about one of Saint Paul's big challenges. After his conversion, a famous story itself, he had to overcome the understandable suspicion and fear of the disciples who did not trust him. At the same time, he had to evade capture and execution by those who considered him a traitor by becoming a disciple of Jesus. Now that was the proverbial "rock and a hard place!" Fortunately, it all worked out. They didn't let fear and prejudice prevail over truth and faith. This is a good lesson for all times, including our own.

Jesus uses the beautiful image of the vine and the branches to describe the relationship between Himself and us, with Our Father as the vine grower. He wants to remain in us, and for us to remain in Him. In this way we continue to branch out as our ancestors in the faith did. There will be times and experiences of pruning, of necessity. These times and life experiences can be met with fear and suspicion or with truth, compassionate love, grace, courage and faith. Let us follow the good example we have been given.