

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

LECTIONARY #54

READING I Acts 14:21-27

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

After Paul and Barnabas had proclaimed the **good news** to that city and made a **considerable number** of disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch. They strengthened the spirits of the disciples and exhorted them to persevere in the faith, saying, "It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God." They appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, commended them to the Lord in whom they had put their faith. Then they traveled through Pisidia and reached Pamphylia. After proclaiming the word at Perga they went down to Attalia. From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work they had now accomplished. And when they arrived, they called the church together and reported what God had done with them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

This is the fifth of eight consecutive weeks we read from Acts.

"That city" is Derbe. Each city is a place where sisters and brothers grasped the faith you still profess.

Lystra = LIS-truh

Iconium = I-KOH-nee-uhm

Antioch = AN-tee-ahk

Speak with calm confidence and strength.

Note the complex sequence: (a) they appointed elders, (b) they prayed and fasted, (c) they entrusted them to God. Help us hear all three stages of the process.

Pisidia = pih-SID-ee-uh

Pamphylia = pam-FIL-ee-uh

Perga = PER-guh

Attalia = uh-TAHL-ee-uh

They were "commended" means that through prayer they were entrusted to God.

Like a family, the "church" awaits the news and gathers to hear of their success.

READING I

The travels of Paul and Barnabas recounted in Acts bring their first missionary journey to completion. As they preach first to Jews and then turn to Gentiles, the missionaries make numerous disciples, a term used in Acts to refer to those who believe in Jesus and are baptized. While making disciples is one part of their mission, they also work to encourage those who are already disciples. Many of those who converted to the faith suffered ridicule, hostility, and even rejection by their own families, as Jesus had predicted (e.g., Luke 21:16). Paul's exhortation

to persevere in the faith is a recognition that the young Church faced persecution.

After establishing Churches, Paul and Barnabas appoint leaders to care for the communities. The act of designating leaders was likely performed with a ritual of laying on of hands, seen elsewhere in Acts as a sign of conferring power, grace, or the Holy Spirit (6:6; 8:17; 9:17; 13:3). The appointed leaders, called elders, are comparable to Jewish officials who administered, advised, and set synagogue policies. Before continuing to the next town, Paul and Barnabas entrust them to the Lord's care.

As Paul and Barnabas complete their journey and return to Antioch, where they began, they report to the community God's actions through them. Of particular importance is the news of God's grace opening "the door of faith to the Gentiles." Admittance of Gentiles into the community of believers without undergoing circumcision was the first major controversy in the Church, addressed by the Council of Jerusalem, described in the chapter immediately following this reading.

For meditation and context:

TO KEEP IN MIND

Pray the text, using your favorite method of praying with Scripture.

This is the fourth of six consecutive weeks we read from Revelation.

Remember this is a vision. Give it a sense of wonder and persuade us that what you describe is indeed possible.

"Sea" represents all that is chaotic and deadly in life.

Speak this vision with the joy you'd have if looking at a daughter adorned to meet her bridegroom.

Intensify the majesty of the moment. The "voice" speaks slowly, with great authority but also compassion.

Speak these as promises and sustain eye contact with the assembly.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 145:8-9, 10-11, 12-13 (see 1)

R. I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.
or **R. Alleluia.**

The LORD is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and of great kindness.

The LORD is good to all
and compassionate toward all his works.

Let all your works give you thanks, O LORD,
and let your faithful ones bless you.

Let them discourse of the glory of your
Kingdom
and speak of your might.

Let them make known your might to the
children of Adam,
and the glorious splendor of your
Kingdom.

Your Kingdom is a Kingdom for all ages,
and your dominion endures through all
generations.

READING II Revelation 21:1-5a

A reading from the Book of Revelation

Then I, John, saw a new heaven and a new earth.

**The former heaven and the former earth had passed away,
and the sea was no more.**

**I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem,
coming down out of heaven from God,
prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.**

I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

"Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race.

He will dwell with them and they will be his people

and God himself will always be with them as their God.

He will wipe every tear from their eyes,

and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain,

for the old order has passed away."

The One who sat on the throne said,

"Behold, I make all things new."

READING II

"I saw a new heaven and a new earth." Thus begins the final vision in the Revelation of John. Writing for a persecuted Church, John uses symbols and images intended to give the faithful people hope and confidence in God's ultimate victory. What the visionary calls "the former heaven and the former earth" is the world in which John's audience is living. The old will give way to utter newness in which all the uncertainty and suffering of the present are no more. Everything that causes them suffering will be destroyed. The sea, the symbolic place

of chaos and danger in the Hebrew tradition, is no more; death, mourning, and pain will also pass away. The entire old order is gone, transformed.

A new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven, will replace the former earthly city. The historical city of Jerusalem, symbolic place of God's dwelling, had been destroyed by the Romans in the year AD 70, long before Revelation was written. What the vision promises is not a restoration of stones and structures but of the people themselves. Jerusalem as a symbol stands for the people as a whole. The people

themselves are to be adorned as a bride, beautiful and pure, welcoming God in their midst.

At the center of the vision is the most important assurance to the beleaguered people: God's abiding presence with them as their own God. The promise is personal and comforting. The final verse begins, "behold," calling people to listen carefully, for God promises to make all things new.

GOSPEL

As soon as Judas leaves the supper with Jesus and his friends, the long awaited hour of Jesus'