

HEARERS OF THE WORD

Acts 1:12-14; Psalm 27 (26); 1 Peter 4:13-16; John 17:1-11a

May they be one as we are one

John 17:1 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, 2 since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. 5 So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

John 17:6 “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. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8 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. 9 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. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11a And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

John 17 forms the climax of the “Farewell Discourse” in the Fourth Gospel. Given the depth of the writing, perhaps it is no surprise that the entire chapter is read only on this Sunday (Year A: 17:1-11; Year B: 11b-19; Year C: 20-26). Even in those places where the Ascension is celebrated on the seventh Sunday of Easter, it would still be good to take up this gospel for reflection and prayer.

In any case, the entire chapter is read this coming week in the daily readings: Tuesday (17:1-11a), Wednesday (17:11b-19) and Thursday (11:20-26).

KIND OF WRITING

The literary setting is the Farewell Discourse, itself a familiar genre from the Old Testament, Jewish writings at the time and from the New Testament itself. The community setting is implied by the literary genre: how will the believers sustain their life and faith after the departure of Jesus? As usual in the fourth Gospel, we experience the double perspective in which the pre-Easter Jesus and the post-Easter community overlap.

John 17 has the following layout:

- I. Jesus prays for his glorification and describes eternal life (1-5)
- II. The beginning of eternal life in the disciples (6-8)
- III. Jesus prays for his disciples (9-19)
- IV. Jesus prays for future believers (20-24)
- V. Jesus concludes his prayer (25-26)

Our reading takes us through parts I, II and the start of III. All of John 17 should be read, to grasp the full power of the prayer. In the course of it, the Johannine Jesus speaks of himself in the third person—a hint that we are hearing the voice of the community.

The themes are: hour, glory, work, perfecting, love, fragility, disciples, union and communion, Jesus’ self-gift and the revelation of God. The only topic “missing” is the Holy Spirit, the paraclete, present very richly in the preceding discourses. The prayer is serene.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

But Moses said to God, “If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” (Exodus 3:13-14)

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will

Thought for the day

Expectedly, very far away worlds can seem familiar. Such is the case with the world of our second reading (and perhaps our Gospel): an intense community, factions within, pressures from outside, different “versions” of the faith, not always reliable leadership, the departure of members, perhaps some significant. Questions arise. What has happened? Who are we? What do we hold on to? Where should we turn? What should we do? The faraway world of 1 Peter and even John’s Gospel seems suddenly recognisable to us today. Their message is simply: keep to heart of the proclamation, Christ our life; keep loving each other; trust the Holy Spirit; it is not *our* project but God’s!

Prayer

Remind us again, loving God, of the great events that give us new life in Christ. Rekindle the gift of the Holy Spirit within each and within all.

put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. (Deuteronomy 18:18)

The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. So they shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless the (Numbers 6:24-27)

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. (Jeremiah 31:33-34)

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

There are two kinds of New Testament

background to bear in mind: the Synoptic and the Johannine.

The Synoptic tradition

At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. *All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.*” (Matt 11:25–27)

This passage is known in scholarship as the “Johannine bolt of lightning”. Below is the *Our Father* in Matthew’s version showing further striking overlaps with John 17. The Note in the Revised New Jerusalem Bible reads, “(t)he majestic final ch. of the discourses is almost a meditation on the Lord’s Prayer.”

Our Father (John 17:1, 5, 11, 21, 24-25) in heaven (17:1), *hallowed* (17:17, 19) be your *name* (17:6, 11-12, 26). Your kingdom come. Your *will* (17:24) be done, on earth (17:4) as it is in heaven (17:1). *Give* (17:2, 4, 6-9, 11-12, 14, 22, 24) us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but *rescue* (cf. *protect*: 17:6, 11-12, 15; *guard*: 17:12) us from the *evil one* (17:15). (Matt 6:9–13)

The Johannine tradition

From the Prologue onwards, there are many echoes of the key vocabulary and topics (given in the brief commentary).

ST PAUL

But we speak God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Cor 2:7–8)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 1 Verses 1-5 summarise the great themes of this Gospel. The hour is immensely significant across this Gospel, reflection its frequency (26x in 24vv). Cf. Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. (John 13:1). The verb to glorify is also important (23x in 16 vv), pointing us to the “lifting up of the Son of Man.”

Verse 2 “Authority” has been present from the very start of this Gospel: *But to all who received him, who believed in his name,*

he gave power (literally “authority”) *to become children of God* (John 1:12; cf. John 1:12; 5:27; 10:18; 17:2; 19:10-11). In this verse, we also have the last occurrence of “eternal life” (John 3:15-16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 40, 47, 54, 68; 10:28; 12:25, 50; 17:2-3), defined in the next verse as faith in Jesus Christ. *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.* (John 3:16)

Verse 3 A dense summary of the gospel proclamation. “To know” is in its full biblical sense—not merely intellectual knowledge but the loving engagement of the whole person. “The one sent” is practically a title of Jesus in this Gospel. It echoes Deuteronomy 18:18 above. Like wise, “true” means utterly reliable in relationship (cf. to the true to).

Verse 4 “On earth” is a hint of the incarnation in 1:14. This is the only use of the word “work” in this Gospel. The meaning is made clear by the verb (plus the corresponding noun and adjective), to finish which has a rich use in this Gospel (John 4:34; 5:36; 13:1; 17:4, 23; 19:28, 30). NB: *Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end* (literally to perfection”). (John 13:1) *When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished”* (literally perfected; John 19:30)

Verse 5 Cf. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.* (John 1:1–2) *And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.* (John 1:14)

Verse 6 Word, either as *logos* or *rēma*, points to both the message and the person of Jesus, which are really identical in this Gospel. Cf. *The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.* (John 6:63) *Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.* (John 6:68) Name is always powerful in a biblical context (cf. *nomen omen*).

Verse 7 That is, they recognise God’s disclosure in Jesus himself.

Verse 8 To receive, cf. *From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.* (John 1:16) To receive or to accept indicates coming to faith, in this Gospel (46x in 41vv). Truly has the sense of really, while retains its interpersonal connotation in this Gospel. To believe is a key catechetical term in John’s Gospel, as a comparison

with its synoptic use shows: Matthew (11), Mark (14), Luke (9), John (98). In John’s Gospel, belief is always a verb and never a noun.

Verse 9 The prayer of Jesus is focussed on believers not on the world, because in this Gospel the world is hostile to faith, even though “God so loved the world.”

Verse 10 This mysterious (mystic?) phrase takes us back to an earlier verse: *All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.* (John 16:15) Intriguingly, *Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.’* (Luke 15:31)

Verse 11a The ambiguity about Jesus’ place (is he here or is he gone?) shows that this is the community looking back on the events of salvation. Cf. *He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.* (John 1:10) *Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father.* (John 13:1) See John 17:21-23.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. My own hope for eternal life may seem abstract. Does today’s Gospel help to make it more real and more relational?
2. The teaching of Jesus — his word — is part of who I am as a disciple. How to I recognise that word within me and how to go about living it day by day?
3. A name is a very precious thing. Do I like my own name, for example? Being entrusted with the “name” of God means being entrusted with God’s very self — an extraordinary claim.

PRAYER

God our Father, glorify your Son in the lives of the people called by his name. Through no merit of ours, you have made us your own, to be your witnesses on earth. Keep us true to the name we bear, that people everywhere may know that you are the God and love of us all.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, the resurrection and the life, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

Glorify God because you bear the name of Christian

1 Pet 4:12 *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.* 13 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. 14 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. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker. 16 Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name. 17 *For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God; if it begins with us, what will be the end for those who do not obey the gospel of God?* 18 *And "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinners?"* 19 *Therefore, let those suffering in accordance with God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good.*

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The reading is well chosen for the final Sunday of the Easter season because of the teaching it contains regarding the Holy Spirit. Believers are asked to recognise the power of the Spirit even as they are being harassed and persecuted for their faith. Verses have been added to give the context more clearly.

KIND OF WRITING

There are three main sections to the body of the letter.

Opening 1:13-2:10
Middle 2:11-4:11
Closing 4:12-5:11

Our reading comes from the start of the closing section.

CONTEXT IN THE COMMUNITY

For a much later generation, this Letter attempts to combine traditions of Peter and Paul. The letter is written to churches in Asia Minor, covering a wide geographical area: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia (a Roman province in western Turkey) and Bithynia. The topics of the letter tell their own story; dignity and status conferred by God on Christians, who are distinct from non-Christians. Their behaviour is expected to be holy and they are to show solidarity in suffering. The Christian community

is seen as the household or family of God.

RELATED PASSAGES

Conduct yourselves honourably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honourable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge. (1 Peter 2:12)

Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. (1 Peter 3:15–16)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 12 The address "beloved" indicates the start of a new section. Referring to suffering as a "fiery ordeal" (literally a burning) serves to suggest the persecution is a means of purification or testing. Cf. *In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.* (1 Peter 1:6–7)

Verse 13 The suffering experienced by the believers can be no surprise because Jesus himself suffered. Not only that, but the present suffering is an opportunity to share in Christ's own agony, pointing to a victorious outcome "when his glory is revealed." The response of joy echoes the teaching of the Matthean Jesus: *Rejoice and be glad because your reward is great in heaven, for they persecuted the prophets before you in the same way.* (Matthew 5:12) Notice the intensification from "be glad" to "shout for joy." Revealed is based on the Greek word "apocalypse."

Verse 14 It is not sufficient to be reviled! This is clear already from the Beatitudes: *"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."* (Matthew 5:11–12) 1 Peter even uses the very same word for blessed (*makarios*). The language used of the Spirit sounds like a combina-

tion of Paul, Matthew, John and Acts—just as you would expect from a later, reconciling text. Cf. *When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.* (Matthew 10:19–20) The "name of Christ" is frequent in the Acts (Acts 2:38; 3:6; 4:10; 8:12; 10:48; 15:26; 16:18). "Spirit of God" is very Pauline.

Verse 15 To establish a contrast, a negative reason for suffering is given. The first three misdemeanours could hardly be clearer. They belong to a general "catalog of vices" found elsewhere. The fourth term is interesting. A mischief maker sounds rather effete. In reality the word may open a window on the way the culture viewed believers in Jesus. The range of meanings proposed is: meddling in other people's business; a concealer of stolen goods; a spy; a revolutionary. It may tell us how the surrounding culture viewed these dangerous outsiders, setting themselves up as the guardians of public morality.

Verse 16 The word "Christian" occurs only three times in the New Testament. The other two uses (Acts 11:26 and 26:28) are on the lips of outsiders. Perhaps the term was coined by Romans (certainly not by Jews). Even the word itself suggests a foreign origin because the ending "*ianos*" is more Latin than Greek. The term is frequent in the writings of Ignatius of Antioch, which would confirm the lateness of 1 Peter. That the term is used positively here may indicate its later acceptance as a badge of honour by Christians (the same happened with the terms puritan and methodist in Church history). Disgrace is a good translation here because "shame" was more public than private in antiquity.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Do I experience shame/disgrace on account of the faith? How does that feel? How do I cope?
2. There can be no joy in suffering as such but there can be joy in bearing witness and in being faithful. What has my experience been?

PRAYER

God of Jesus Christ, whose name we bear, help us to bear witness as well to the name above all other names, so that sharing in his sufferings we may partake in his glory, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

All devoted themselves to prayer

Acts 1:12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. 13 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. 14 All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The short reading is perfectly chosen for the Sunday between Ascension and Pentecost. It has air is anticipation and expectation.

KIND OF WRITING

The story is first of all a bridge passage, pointing beyond the present context to the feast of Pentecost (12-13a). Secondly, it offers a list (13b). Listing the followers of a departed leader is known in writings of the period. In this case, the list is expanded to include women — unusual in such lists — and family. Finally, it portrays in summary fashion the activities of the continuing group of disciples (14).

CONTEXT IN THE COMMUNITY

Acts chapter 1 has a clear topic—the earliest disciples are to be witnesses—and a clear layout, as follows:

- 1-4: prologue to the second book
- 6-11: the departure of Jesus
- 12-14: the waiting of the disciples
- 15-25: the restoration of the Twelve

RELATED PASSAGES

The related passages are noted in the comment.

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God. (Luke 24:50–53)

When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. (Luke 19:29–

30)

As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, (Luke 19:37)

Every day he was teaching in the temple, and at night he would go out and spend the night on the Mount of Olives, as it was called. (Luke 21:37)

He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. (Luke 22:39)

And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles: Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, and James, and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Simon, who was called the Zealot, and Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. (Luke 6:13–16)

Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and get information from him, and I stayed with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except *James the Lord's brother*. (Galatians 1:18–19)

Isn't this the carpenter, the son of Mary and *brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon?* And aren't his sisters here with us?" And so they took offence at him. (Mark 6:3)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 12 In Luke, the place of “departure” is given as Bethany, also on the Mount of Olives. Bethany reminds us of the triumphal entry (see Luke 19:29-30 above) and thus frames the entire story of the events of salvation. The Mount of Olives, on the other hand, reminds us of Jesus customary place of prayer when in Jerusalem (see Luke 21:37 and 22:39 above). At that time, the disciples were unable to pray even through Jesus instructs them on prayer. In contrast, the disciples are portrayed as faithful to Jesus but also faithful to Jewish tradition (cf. Luke 23:54–56). The Mount of Olives has eschatological significance within the Jewish tradition. Cf. Zechariah 14:4-5.

Verse 13a Although a different word is

used in Greek to refer to the upper room, we are to think of the place where the Last Supper was held (Luke 22:12).

Verse 13b The reader will notice the variation in listing the twelve. Instead of Peter, Andrew, James, John, we have Peter James, John, Andrew. Judas Iscariot is, of course, omitted in anticipation of vv. 18-19, where his gruesome demise is recounted. (A contrasting legend is given in Matthew 27:3-10.) The women in the list—as noted above, an unusual feature—includes Mary as a bridge figure between those who following Jesus and his family (see Luke 8:2; 23:49, 55; 24:10). Of the family, only James, the “brother of the Lord,” is mentioned again (Acts 12:17, 15:13-21 and 21:17-18). Cf. Galatians 1:18-19 above.

Verse 14 Luke often gives summary statements to describe a general situation or usual practice: (i) brief summaries in Acts 1:12–14; 6:7; 8:14; 9:31–32; 11:19–20); (ii) detailed summaries in 2:41–47; 4:32–35; 5:12–16. Here in Acts 1:14, the summary concludes the ascension narrative and prepares for the descent of the Holy Spirit. This is the last mention of Mary the mother of Jesus, although we are most likely meant to think of her present at Pentecost as well, as in the iconographic tradition (which includes Paul as well, showing a freedom from historical constraints!). Who are the “brothers of Jesus” here? It might mean disciples in general but in the familial context may point to James and Jude (see Mark 6:3 above).

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. What is my own experience of the times “in between”, perhaps at some important turning point in my own life?
2. The constant prayer of the disciples echoes Luke 18:1. When I am consistent in my own prayer, what difference has it made?
3. In the Christian project, we are always part of a community of faith. Who are my community of faith today, with who I pray and live my discipleship?
4. How am I preparing to receive the Holy Spirit again this Pentecost?

PRAYER

In this time of waiting, open up our hearts and lives, to receive again this year, the promise of the Father, that we may be clothed with power from on high, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE LITURGY

Acts 1:12-14; Psalm 27 (26); 1 Peter 4:13-16; John 17:1-11a

THEMES ACROSS THE READINGS

Different moments or kinds of expectation mark the readings for this Sunday. In the scene from Acts, all are gathered in anticipation of the descent of the Spirit. John 17 portrays the risen Lord prayer for the community in the future. Finally, in the reading from 1 Peter, the community is being asked to suffer now for a greater, future gladness. Because of the gift of the Spirit, because of the presence and prayer of the Risen Lord, Christians enabled not simply to endure but to be transformed by our endurance, tested as gold is tested in fire (1 Peter 1:7).

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

The Lord has just ascended and so the words of the Psalm are particularly fitting: *Of you my heart has spoken, seek his face.*

SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

First reading

Acts 8:5-8, 14-17

How do people come to faith and Christian community? This reading portrays two stages, which might challenge the way we do things. The starting point is awakening and only later comes the confirmation.

Second reading

1 Peter 3:15-18

This passage is often quoted because of the line “always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have.” This is surely important, but the phrase before it is just as much a key: “Reverence the Lord Christ in your hearts.

Gospel

John 14:15-21

John’s Gospel uses a few times an expression for the Holy Spirit, which is “advocate”. We probably think “lawyer” and that’s not wrong. More richly, it means someone who stands along side you. Not a bad way to think of the Holy Spirit.

WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

Monday 25 May

St Bede the Venerable, priest, doctor

Acts 19:1-8

Followers of John the Baptist who did not believe in Jesus as Messiah continued to exist for a long time.

John 16:29-33

Although Jesus speaks plainly throughout this Gospel (unlike in Mark), nevertheless the slow journey of the disciples is registered. The overall tone is one of encouragement.



Tuesday 26 May

St Philip Neri, priest

Acts 20:17-27

Today’s reading is a very touching scene: the final farewell of Paul to the faithful of Ephesus. It offers a kind of apologia for the Pauline mission.

John 17:1-11

Today we hear the start of the final prayer from the Farewell Discourse. It is, of course, a prayer; but it is also a kind of summing of the teaching so far and a looking forward to the time after the resurrection. *You may notice the typical “definition” of eternal life: And eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*

Wednesday 27 May

St Augustine of Canterbury, bishop

Acts 20:28-38

Paul’s last speech to the elders in Ephesus is full of still valid and good advice and the very last moment is very moving.

John 17:11-19

“Glorify” may sound strange to us, as if Jesus were looking for some kind of vain recognition. In this Gospel, however, to glorify point to the cross; specifically, it means that the heart of God, God’s inner identity, is disclosed in Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Thursday 28 May

Acts 22:30, 23:6-11

“Divide and conquer” is an old rule and Paul uses it cannily in today’s vignette. Paradoxically, Paul is “rescued” by the very officials who hold him prisoner.

John 17:20-26

This heartfelt prayer will touch us all. Although conflict *is* normal, at every level, it cannot be normative. Therefore, we strive for forgiveness, reconciliation and true fellowing or oneness. May this great prayer be ours today!

Friday 29 May

St Paul VI, bishop of Rome

Acts 25:13-21

A key event in the life of Paul is recounted. He was under arrest in Caesarea. As a Roman citizen, he makes appeal to the emperor.

John 21:15-19

Because our reading of John is coming to a close as the Easter Season ends, the lectionary takes us forward to chapter 21. In the background, there is an oblique reminder of his betrayal (charcoal). But in the foreground stands the high call to love and the fundamental call to follow.

Saturday 30 May

Acts 28:16-20, 30-31

The closing of the Acts is a marvellous scene. Paul is in Rome and still preaching. It is notable that the very last sentence of the Acts reads as follows (in Greek): proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ with complete freedom and *unhindered*. A great ending — and a great beginning, because it is up to us the readers to continue the task.

John 21:20-25

Our Gospel is also a closing scene. It was important for the community, dealing with the death of their beloved leader. At the same time, it provide the writer with a second chance to close the whole book, with mixed feelings of exasperation and wonder!