

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 14, 2017



*Almighty ever-living God,  
 constantly accomplish the Paschal Mystery within us,  
 that those you were pleased to make new  
 in Holy Baptism may, under your protective care,  
 bear much fruit and come to the joys of life eternal.  
 Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
 who lives and reigns with you  
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
 one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*



Collect for Fifth Sunday of Easter

Today, in the United States, we celebrate Mother's Day. Reflecting on the gift of our mothers, we recognize she carried us under her heart for nine months. As a good mother, she nurtured and guided us in our early years. As we grew, she served as a role model.



*Dear Lord, today I turn to you to give you thanks for my mother.  
 With your own gift of life, she bore me in her womb and gave me life.  
 She tenderly, patiently cared for me and taught me to walk and talk.  
 She read to me and made me laugh.  
 No one delighted in my successes more;  
 no one could comfort me better in my failures.  
 I am so grateful for how she mothered me and mentored me, and even disciplined me.  
 Please bless her, Lord, and comfort her.  
 Help her loving heart to continue to love and give of herself to others.  
 Strengthen her when she is down and give her hope when she is discouraged.  
 Most of all, Lord, on this Mother's Day,  
 give my mother the graces she most needs and desires today.  
 I ask you this, in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Savior forever and ever. Amen.*

<http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Mothers/#Gratitude>



In reality though, there are women who find this day very painful. There are women who very much desire a child, but for some reason cannot conceive. There are women whose children have turned against them, as much as they have tried to love them. There are women who have had many miscarriages. There are women who have been widowed. In our prayer, we need to remember each of these.

*God, we are weary and grieved. We were anticipating the birth of a child, but the promise of life was ended too soon. Our arms yearned to cradle new life, our mouths to sing soft*

*lullabies. Our hearts ache from the emptiness and the silence. We are saddened and we are angry. We weep and we mourn. Weep with us, God, Creator of Life, for the life that could not be.*

*Source of healing, help us to find healing among those who care for us and those for whom we care. Shelter us under wings of love and help us to stand up again for life even as we mourn our loss.*

--Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, from Lifecycles: Jewish Women on Life Passages and Personal Milestones

During the month of May, we can place all of these women under the care of Mary, the Mother of us all.

In the Liturgy of the Word for today, in the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, (Acts 6:1-7), we hear about the Hellenists worrying about a particular group, their widows, most necessarily, childless, who were not receiving what they needed for their sustenance. The Hellenists spoke to the Twelve and the community of disciples about this issue. In this society, if widows had no children or no family, they would be desolate. This is a challenge for us today. We need to speak up for our poor and forgotten that are in our world, near or far. The Twelve and the community of disciples appointed "seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom." (Acts 6:3) (Whenever we hear the number seven, we know that this is a perfect number, recognizing that these men will care for the needs of these women.)



Only Stephen and Philip are discussed in much detail in Acts of the Apostles; tradition provides nothing further about Nicanor or Parmenas. Stephen became the first martyr of the church when he was killed by a mob, and whose death was witnessed by Saul of Tarsus, the future Apostle Paul (Acts 8:1). Philip evangelized in Samaria, where he converted Simon Magus and an Ethiopian eunuch. Tradition tells us that Prochorus was the nephew of Stephen and a companion of John the Evangelist. St. John consecrated Prochorus bishop of Nicomedia in Bithynia. He was said to have ended his life as a martyr in Antioch in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Nicanor was a Cypriot Jew who returned to his native island and died a martyr. Parmenas was said to have settled down in Macedonia, where he supposedly died at Philippi in the Trajan persecutions. Nicholas, who came from Antioch, was described in Acts as a convert to Judaism.

In our contemporary church, our deacons are to be ministers of service. As we pray for widows, we need to pray for our deacons also.

Praying in response to our first reading from Acts, we say *Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you*. We are praying for mercy because there are times in our world that we do not see the poor and forgotten. In our faith, we know that God cares for everyone, which is reflective of our trust in God. It is in God's great love that we become aware of those we have neglected.

Our second reading (1 Peter 2:4-9) reminds us that Christ is the cornerstone (cf. Is 28:16) being the foundation of the spiritual edifice of the Christian community. To unbelievers, Christ is an obstacle and a stumbling block on which they are destined to fall (1 Pt 2:8; Rom 11:11).

As in the first reading we recall the appointment of seven righteous men to care for the needs of the widows this reading reminds us of the greatness of our call:

*You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood,  
a holy nation, a people of his own,  
so that you may announce the praises of him  
who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

1 Peter 2:9

As Paul uses the imagery of our being the Body of Christ, with Christ as the head, Peter uses the imagery of a building, with Christ as the cornerstone.

Chronologically, our Psalm was composed centuries before the birth of Christ and is still used appropriately in our 21<sup>st</sup>-century prayer. In all probability, the letter Peter was written next, then the Acts of the Apostles and finally the Gospel of John, all within the first century of the Church. Throughout the time after Jesus' ascension, all writings were edited by the faith community.



Our reading from John, for today, is taken from the Last Supper discourse. This, then on Mother's Day, can speak to the hearts of all mothers. For many of us, we can recall that it was our mothers who first taught us our prayers. In having been taught our prayers then we learned that Jesus is *the way, the truth, and the life*.

In the beginning of this gospel for today the words of Jesus, *do not let your hearts be troubled*, are echoed numerous times by moms who were trying to calm their child's fears. It is good moms wish their children to go to heaven where they hope to be. In many ways moms are teaching their children *to know, to love, and to serve our God, so to live happily with the Triune God forever in heaven*.

In the early church, Christianity was called "*The Way*". At the trial of Jesus, Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" Little did Pilate know that Jesus himself is *the truth*. Throughout his teachings, Jesus kept reminding us that we are here for *eternal life*.

At the setting for this gospel, the disciples had been with Jesus for three years. The questions of Thomas, (who is always the doubter), and Philip (questioning the ways of Jesus, like it the time Jesus fed the multitude) are very much like the questions that little ones ask their parents along away. Bless our moms for answering these questions thousands of times!

On this Mother's Day, we can pray to our God who is parent of all parents:

*Compassionate God, protect the innocent children who suffer or witness violence and abuse at the hands of the ones they love. Bring them to a safe place where they can begin to heal. Restore their minds to trust and their hearts to love and their spirits to be free. Surround them with your angels.*

*God of Peace, restrain the hands and convert the hearts of those who seek to do violence. Bring to repentance the perpetrators of domestic violence, and minister with persistent grace to all those harmed by abuse, that they may be signs of your healing power and hope for the world.*



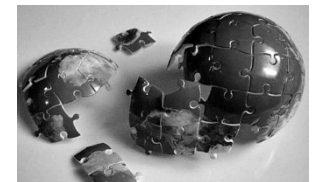
*God of Mercy, there are many places and many people who do not experience your peace. Right now, there are many, many women and children who live under the weight of fear and violence in their own homes. We ask you to surround them with your loving care, shelter them and protect them so they may experience healing in body, mind and spirit.*



*Gentle God, we pray for the many men who themselves feel powerless and confused about their relationships. We ask that you would help them find healthy ways to work through their frustrations and to find hope without resorting to destructive impulses.*

*Suffering God, stand always with those hurt by violence and abuse. We pray that as a church you help us to hear the voices of those who cry in silence. Give voice to all who cry out, give courage to all who speak out; and give power to all who intervene, replacing abuse with loving justice.*

*God of strength, give us courage to participate with you in restoring this broken world to wholeness. May we be instruments of your peace and light amidst the darkness so all may share in the hope of your kingdom.*



*We ask all this through God our Creator, Jesus our Redeemer and the Holy Spirit who sustains and comforts us. Amen.*

- Sr. Ruth Harkins, IHM

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