

## SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (5/23-24/2009)

*Acts 1/15-26, Psalm 103, 1 John 4/11-16, John 17/11-19*

Today's Scripture readings seem most appropriate for the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Yesterday, nine men were ordained to the priesthood for Chicago, Cook and Lake Counties.

All have spent at least six to eight years in preparation for ordination.

When my class of 46 was ordained 52 years ago, this very Gospel passage (*John 17/11-19*) was proclaimed before our ordination banquet after the Mass..

It has stayed etched in my memory ever since.

Jesus prays that his disciples, his followers, will remain protected and guided by his Father.

He knows they will face many challenges along the way, but he is certain the Father will keep them from the evil one.

They no longer belong to the world just as Jesus was not controlled by this world and its values.

He prays that they will dedicate themselves to living out the truth in their lives.

All in all, it's a significant prayer for these young men beginning their service as priests.

The reading from the *Acts of the Apostles* today tells the story of the replacement of the one apostle who went wrong – Judas Iscariot.

The community had two candidates, prayed over them and chose Matthias as the new apostle.

At that time, the Gospels had not yet been written, but I hope that the community, in its prayer, would have remembered Jesus' words quoted in today's Gospel.

The second reading is taken from *1 John*, and, in its own way, is a model for priests

The formula for being a good priest is simple enough: "*If God so loved us, we also must love one another.*"

That is how these newly ordained men will know they are doing God's will, by their love for one another and for their people.

There is another group of men being ordained for service to the Archdiocese this weekend.

Fifteen men will be ordained to the Permanent Diaconate on this very Sunday at Queen of All Saints Basilica in Chicago..

These men and their wives have spent the last four years preparing themselves, along with working their jobs, helping at their parishes, and being an essential part of their families.

I work with a few of them and am impressed with the sense of commitment to service that these family men have.

Nine priests and fifteen deacons! Wonderful!

Two weeks ago, at the seminary, a number of laity, men and women, graduated from programs that prepare them for service in the church.

They came from all walks of life, Anglo and Spanish, black and white, young and old; truly it was a delight to behold.

The Church goes on as more and more of the baptized are taking up their rightful places in the service of that Church.

These conscientious men and women take literally the words of Jesus that, if God loves us, then we must love one another.

*Ad multos annos!* May you and your work thrive for many years.

## **FEAST OF THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD (Same date as for the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday.)**

*Acts 1/1-11, Psalm 47, Ephesians 1/17-23, Mark 16/15-20*

On the History channel, they sometimes run a series on UFOs (unidentified flying objects). Apparently, there are a fair amount of people who really believe UFOs exist and contain extra-terrestrial beings who have been exploring and scouting out this planet for some time. Reports of strange lights in the skies continue to crop up periodically. Why, there are even some who believe Elijah in the Old Testament and Jesus in the Acts of the Apostles were taken up into the heavens by alien visitors! For obvious reasons, the Church has thus far ignored these suggestions.

What we do believe, however, may sound just as strange to someone not familiar with the Christian message.

We believe Jesus died, and then was raised from the dead into a whole new transformed existence. We believe that he continued to meet with his followers for forty days after the resurrection. Then we assert that he ascended into heaven, from where he sent his Holy Spirit on those who had followed him on earth.

Now that's a package of beliefs that can be pretty baffling to some! And yet, we believe it. We are not superstitious, naïve folks intent on manipulating the presence of God. We believe all these things because they are found in the Holy Scriptures and are taught by the Church. But let me offer a way of thinking about these "mysteries", for mysteries are what they are.

Jesus lived and died; those are provable facts; secular history attests to them.

Unlike the rest of us, his death was not the end of his appearance in this world, in this dimension.

Jesus rose from the dead and took up an entirely new way of living, but we cannot "prove" that with scientific facts.

It's a question of belief; we take God's word for it as attested to in the Scriptures, and we take the word of the eye-witnesses who experienced the risen Lord.

Some people cannot believe in the resurrection; they find it un-credible.

If they can't, then no amount of persuasion is likely to convince them otherwise.

At some point after the resurrection, Jesus took leave of this dimension of his life and work.

He returned to his Father in heaven. We call that his ascension into heaven!

We may immediately think in spatial terms: heaven is up above and hell is down below.

It's a way of imaging the mystery, but it is not literally true, especially since we know so much more about the universe and "up" and "down" than did the first Christians.

We are talking about a spiritual destination where a resurrected body can live.

Nothing in our human experience prepares us for that reality, but we believe it to be true.

I ostensibly set out to "explain" the mystery, and, as I re-read what I have written, I chuckle at my presumption; a mystery is a mystery precisely because it cannot be explained.

We believe it or we do not; that's the long and short of it.

As we used to say when we were kids, "What's it to you?"