

24th April 2005 Easter Five

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Readings:

- Acts 7:55-60
- Psalm 31: 1-5, 17-18 p250
- 1Peter 2:11-25
- John 14:1-14

As I think about ANZAC DAY, I ponder what sorts of terrible situations, what sort of injuries were received and what thoughts went through the minds of those confronted by the realities of war. I'm sure they wondered about God and if God's love for them was real. I'm sure too they pondered the suffering of Jesus and what it all meant for them.

ANZAC about peace not war,
waste and stupidity, / courage and sacrifice

I wonder too about Chappelle Corby and the nine young Australians caught in possession of heroin. What strength they will need and whether God will be able to touch them, to give hope.

In the passage from Acts we read about Stephen, one of the seven (deacons) set apart to organize the food distribution to the Greek widows among the followers of Jesus.

He was now condemned to death by stoning.

Stoning was a gruesome death as people now threw not small stones, but large rocks to break bones and crush heads. So here was Stephen being stoned to death for his sermon in the synagogue — how crazy//there was no debate or discussion, Stephen was wrong and therefore deserved to die. What we **do** know about Stephen is that he was a man "full of faith and the Holy Spirit." (Acts 6:5) who was one of the believers in Jerusalem. He had spoken in the synagogue of the freedmen (former slaves) and because they could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke they instigated some men to accuse him falsely.

The accusation was one of blasphemy:

That he said Jesus of Nazareth would destroy the temple *and* that he would change the customs Moses taught.

After his long speech we find him now about to be killed and we hear two things:

- that he was filled with the Holy Spirit
- that he gazed into heaven and saw the Glory of God and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

"Son of Man" is an ancient glorious figure — Jesus is this Son of Man —

and it is quite obvious that these strengthen him as he is to die.

Now I mention these because they seem to be the same aspect (same elements?) in what Jesus is saying.

He speaks of his going away // his going to the Father's glory and that his followers will do greater things "because he goes to the Father."

We interpret these words of Jesus to mean his rising and his ascending to the Father's glory and the pouring out of his Spirit upon his people —

As we read it here and later in the appearance of Jesus to the disciples where he breathes the Holy Spirit upon them, we see the continuity // the connection between Jesus' resurrection // his entering the Father's glory // and the Spirit.

The reason we read this passage today is because we are coming to the end of the Easter Season and we look to the "what next" phase of Jesus' ministry — and of course, the next thing is to ponder Jesus going away — his Ascension of his entering the glorious presence of the Father.

We notice too that Jesus' words about the gift of the Holy Spirit are cryptic — they are not clear.

"The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father." [pause]

The picture of Stephen is that of one who does the works of Jesus — he is filled with the Holy Spirit and sees the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand side of God.

The first reading about Stephen and the second from the letter of Peter give a picture of the early Christians doing great things.

Peter's letter encourages the believers to recognize that they are aliens and exiles — that they in fact belong to God while living amidst the difficulties of their situation.

I imagine too that the situation in which they lived was much less free than the way we live in Australia where freedom is paramount. These Christians have to walk a very fine line to be accepted and to actually be able to express their faith (probably something like being a Christian in Iran) so the author (possibly *not* the original Peter) encourages them to bear with oppression and suffering — to have a vision of Christ in his suffering — and in so doing to find strength.

In each of our readings today we are called to keep the vision of the Risen Christ in the midst of the issues we face in the world and to know that God's Spirit will be given to sustain us.

We pray that the ANZACS may know the Glory of God and that those young Australians whether innocent or guilty may also be aware of God's Spirit to sustain them...

Help us Lord to know your

- Way
- Truth
- Life

followed by hymn
from Together in Song 552
words by George Herbert 1593-1633

"Come my way, my truth, my life
such a way as gives us breath
such a truth as ends all strife
such a life as killeth death.

Come, my light, my feast, my strength
such a light as shows a feast,
such a feast as mends in length,
such a strength as makes his guest.

Come, my joy, my love, my heart,
such a joy as none can move,
such a love as none can part,
such a heart as joys in love.