

Fifth Sunday of Easter
Cycle A RCL
Revised

Acts 7:55-60

In volume one of Luke-Acts, the author has Jesus tell the Council that from then on the Son of Man would sit at the right hand of the power of God (Luke 22:69). So unsurprisingly, Stephen sees the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God (7:56) in the vision that precedes Stephen's death. Since Maccabean times Jews had believed the Holy Spirit had departed from Israel and, along with *her* (always feminine in Hebrew and Aramaic), prophecy disappeared. Jewish apocalyptic taught that only in the last times would the Spirit reappear, and Luke-Acts makes extensive use of this expectation. Folding Saul into Stephen's execution as a bystander sympathetic to the Council, points us toward Saul's conversion by means of a blinding vision (9:3-9), aided by the vision of Ananias (9:10-19), who was "filled with the Holy Spirit (9:17b).

Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16

This psalm includes both a *lament* (verses 1-18), from which today's Response derives, and a *thanksgiving* (19-24). As is the case with several of the laments, we find only general complaints, thus allowing worshipers to use the prayer in many different situations. The principal complaints of the laments, however, have to do with enemies. After praying a lament, the worshiper would return to the temple to thank God for fulfilling his petition. This public declaration of God's faithfulness would encourage others to call upon the Lord in times of distress and thus enhance God's public reputation (*shem*, "name") as a God who is faithful to God's promises and powerful enough to enact them.

1 Peter 2:2-10

The reference to "newborn infants" in 2:2 suggests that the readers are to be regarded as relative newcomers to the faith in need of elementary instruction. (See Hebrews 5:11-14.) The passage defines the Christian church in terms of Exodus 19:6: "a royal priesthood and a holy nation." The term "race" in 1 Peter 2:9 translates *genos*, properly "nation" or "people." This definition of the church as a "nation" might have been misunderstood by Roman leaders as seditious had the author not qualified it by defining the purpose of the "priestly nation" to be the offering of spiritual sacrifices to God (2:5).

John 14:1-14

This chapter begins the so-called "farewell discourse" of the Fourth Gospel, a long speech Jesus gives his students at their last meal together before his crucifixion. Farewell discourses are common in Greco-Roman literature as well as in biblical and apocalyptic texts and have as their literary aim the description of the situation of the students after the death of the master. The intended irony of the discourse in John is that Jesus' death is the beginning point of a more intense relationship between him and his followers than was possible during the years of his ministry.