

## Reflection for the 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Today we celebrate the 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, and next weekend we celebrate the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord, and then the following week we celebrate Pentecost Sunday. Following Pentecost Sunday on Monday of the 7<sup>th</sup> week of Ordinary Time, the Feast of Mary, Mother of the Church is celebrated. This Memorial Mass was decreed in 2018 by Pope Francis. In 1964 Pope Paul VI declared that the Blessed Virgin Mary is the Mother of the Church, and in 1975 a votive Mass was placed in the Roman Missal in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church. Pope Francis in 2018 pointed out that the Feast of Mary as the Mother of the Church can help the faithful see and embrace the maternal nature of the Church.

Throughout the Season of Easter, the first reading of the Mass is taken from the Acts of the Apostles with a few exceptions including the Vigil Mass for Pentecost Sunday. The reason why the Acts of the Apostles replaces the Old Testament Reading in Masses during the Easter Season is that the Acts of the Apostles gives an account of the Church in its earliest days. It does seem appropriate that as we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, we in our readings at Mass during the Easter Season hear of the Church forming and discovering its calling with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The loving act of Jesus Christ dying on the cross and rising on the third day calls for a response. The Church's response to the loving act of Jesus Christ is the subject matter for the New Testament book titled *The Acts of the Apostles*. In our First Reading this Sunday taken from the Acts of the Apostles we hear of an encounter between St. Peter and the Centurion Cornelius, this encounter takes place because of a vision that both St. Peter and Cornelius have. What transpires in this encounter is that Cornelius and his family are baptized because of the faith that St. Peter witnesses.

It might be helpful to take a moment and explore what leads to the encounter that St. Peter and Cornelius have. Near the end of chapter 9 in the Acts of the Apostles we hear that the Church is at peace, that it is growing and walking in fear of the Lord. Next, we hear that Saint Peter travels to Lydda to visit the faithful there and heals Aeneas who had been paralyzed for 8 years. While in Lydda members of the Church ask him to go to Joppa, because a member of the Church, Tabitha had recently fallen sick and passed away. St. Peter goes to Joppa and raises Tabitha from the dead. It is while St. Peter is still in Joppa, that Cornelius in Caesarea sends men to bring St. Peter to his house. Cornelius a Centurion, and member of the Italica Cohort has a vision of an angel of God informing Him, "Your prayers and almsgiving have ascended as a memorial offering before God. Now send some men to Joppa and summon one Simon who is called Peter." Cornelius was known to be an upright and God-fearing man, along with his whole household gave alms generously to the Jewish people and prayed to God constantly. St. Peter who had also had a vision goes with the men Cornelius as sent to Caesarea.

It is the encounter that is related to us in our First Reading this Sunday that St. Peter witnesses the Holy Spirit falling on all who are assembled circumcised believers and Gentiles, all are heard speaking in tongues and glorifying God. This event prompts St. Peter to say, "can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit even as we have?" The event confirms that Jesus intends the Good News to be shared with all peoples, this event also confirms that when Jesus Christ was on the Cross and informed St. John that the Blessed Mother from that moment on is his Mother, Jesus was informing St. John that Mary is the Mother of the Church, of all the members of the Church. This message that we receive in our First Reading this Sunday that the Church is open to everyone leads perfectly to the message that we find in our Gospel reading this Sunday taken from the Gospel of John in which we hear of Jesus speaking to His disciples and He says to them, "this I command you: love one another." It does not get any clearer than this, we are commanded by our Lord and Savior to love one another, to welcome everyone. I guess we could try to find a way to limit this calling or try to explain away what statement is clearly stating. We could place the

statement into a historical context that does not exist today. But if we do that, are we not missing the point of the visions that St. Peter and Cornelius had? So, may we all embrace the events that happened in Caesarea at Cornelius' house that inform us the Church is meant for everyone and may we embrace the commandment of Jesus Christ to love one another. In the world today I would say that this is a message that is truly needed. In closing the Mother of the Church, the Blessed Virgin Mary through her example and intercession can help all of us to welcome each other, and love one another.