

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

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Acts 10:44-48

NRSV

Peter has been bidden to visit Cornelius, an officer of the Roman army of occupation stationed in Caesarea. Both have had visions; in Peter's case, he has been advised not to worry about what meat a Jew can eat per Mosaic law (and whether he can visit a Gentile home.) Peter visits Cornelius and his household: "many had assembled" (v. 27). Peter tells them that God has shown him not to distinguish between Jews and non-Jews (v. 28). Cornelius, a devout man who reveres and prays to God, tells him of his vision, of God's agent who told him to send for Peter. Cornelius says: "So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say" (v. 33).

Peter summarizes Jesus' earthly ministry. In Jesus' baptism, the Father anointed [him] ... with the Holy Spirit and with power" (v. 38). The apostles witnessed "all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem" (v. 39). Jesus was crucified, but the Father "raised him ... and allowed him to appear" (v. 40) in the flesh to those chosen by God. Jesus commanded them to spread the good news, and to testify that he, as God's agent, is to judge (at the end of the era) those still living and those who have died (v. 42). He is the one of whom the Old Testament prophets spoke: "everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins" (v. 43).

Now, the Holy Spirit comes, as a "gift" (v. 45), on all present, "even on the Gentiles": to the surprise of the Jewish Christians "who had come with Peter". ("Speaking in tongues", v. 46, is a sign of the presence of the Spirit.) The pouring out of the Spirit and baptism are closely associated in Acts; here baptism follows the coming of the Spirit. Peter's question (v. 47) amounts to: we Jewish Christians received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (2:14); now these Gentiles have received it, so surely they can be baptised. So they are baptised – not by Peter, but under his authority (v. 48). During his stay, Peter presumably ate with these non-Jews. In 11:1-18, Peter returns to Jerusalem, and defends his actions. He recalls that Jesus had told them that they would receive the Holy Spirit. God has given the Gentiles "the same gift that he gave us when we believed" (11:17), so who was I to stand in God's way? Those present "praised God, saying, 'Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to [eternal] life'" (11:18).

Psalms 98

NRSV

Worshippers are invited to sing "a new song" marking new evidence of God's rule. With truth ("right hand") and power, he has won the "victory", i.e. salvation, saving acts – for his people Israel. (Note the emphasis on "victory": the word occurs three times in vv. 1-3.) He has triumphed over all who seek to overthrow his kingdom. All peoples can see that Israel is right in trusting him ("vindication", v.

2). Then v. 3: as he did when the Israelites groaned under oppression in Egypt (Exodus 2:24), he now remembers his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – to lead them and protect them. All peoples will see his saving acts. (These verses are in the past tense, but a scholar points out that the reference is to a future event.)

Vv. 4-8 call on all creation ("earth", "sea", "floods" and "hills") to acknowledge and be joyful in God's rule. Per v. 7b, people of all lands are invited to join in. God's coming to "judge the world" (v. 9b) will be a truly marvellous event. He will judge us, but his judgement will be perfectly fair and equitable, for he is righteous.

1 John 5:1-6

NRSV

All who believe that "Jesus is the Christ" (vv. 1, 5), the saviour of the world who offers forgiveness of deviations from God's ways, have been adopted as children of God. All who love God ("the parent") also love his or her fellow believers: this love is a dimension of God. The mark of loving God and obeying him is loving our fellows (v. 2). Loving God implies that we obey him (v. 3); this is not "burdensome" for us, being God's, for we have the power to overcome evil. It is through our faith in God that we are victorious: we believe that "Jesus is the Son of God" (v. 5): this is the very core of our faith. As people come to Christ, so God's power is shown more widely in the world. Some dissidents may have accepted that Jesus was baptised ("came by water", v. 6) but rejected his very human agony on the cross ("blood"); however, but he experienced both baptism and crucifixion. The Spirit witnessed both these events; he is continually present as the *soul* of the Church, the continuation of Christ's action in the world. In vv. 7-8, the author tells us that three things jointly "testify" that Jesus is Son of God: (1) "the Spirit", at work in the community, (2) baptism ("water"), and (3) the crucifixion and/or the Eucharist ("blood").

John 15:9-17

NRSV

Jesus continues to prepare his disciples for his physical departure from them. He has told them that he is the "true" (v. 1) vine, the Father's agent, and that they are the "fruit" (v. 2), "the branches" (v. 5). They represent him in the world – to bear fruit, to *do* in his name. This is how God's power will be extended among humans.

He has loved them as the Father has loved him; they are to continue to love him, by being obedient to his "commandments" (v. 10); he has been obedient, even to death on the cross. He continues to be in a loving relationship with the Father. This kind of love leads to "joy" (v. 11), ultimate joy. Jesus, the model for our behaviour, loved us so much that he gave his life for us, his "friends" (v. 13).

To be a *servant* (v. 15) of God was an honour in Old Testament times, but a servant was not normally admitted to the counsel of his master while "friends" were: his disciples know all that the Father has told him. Jesus has taken the initiative in choosing them and appointing them to seek converts who will be deeply and lastingly committed to him (v. 16).