***About today’s Mass readings for today, The Seventh Sunday of Easter***

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| **First Reading: Acts 1:12-14**  How are we to envisage what happened at the Ascension, which is recorded just before this reading? Two feet disappearing into a cloud, as can be seen in the Chapel of the Ascension in the Shrine Church in Walsingham? It is mentioned only in the Acts of the Apostles. St Luke, the author, is putting across several messages. Firstly, the forty days since Easter should not be carefully counted. In biblical language ‘40’ makes just ‘a fairly long period’, often a period of preparation, like Jesus’ forty days being tested in the desert, or Israel’s forty years of the Exodus. For all that time Jesus has been preparing his apostles. Secondly, it is the definitive parting of the physical Jesus, after which the Risen Christ is no longer with his disciples. It is now the Spirit of Christ which is at the heart of the Church, inspiring all its activity. Thirdly, Luke represents Jesus as a prophet (and more than a prophet), so he leaves his disciples in the same way as the prophet Elijah, who was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot, leaving his disciple Elisha to carry on his work, filled with a double share of his spirit. As we read in this passage, we too like Mary and the Apostles must wait in prayer for the Spirit of the Lord.  **Second Reading: 1 Peter 4:13-16**  For the second to seventh Sundays of Easter, the second reading comes from the first of the two letters in the New Testament, attributed to St Peter. The recipients of the letter are reminded repeatedly of the grandeur of their Christian calling, and are counselled to support one another in imitating the example of Christ’s endurance of his sufferings, which will merit a great reward. The letter is attributed to St Peter as a letter from him to the churches in a large area of Asia Minor, but its vocabulary and rhetorical style make it highly unlikely to have been the work of a Galilean fisherman. As with many of the shorter writings of the New Testament the fact that its provenance is pseudepigrapical should cause no difficulty – it is the message and example of the early church towards the end of the first century that makes it worthy of our attention.   |  | | --- | | **Gospel: John 17:1-11a**  The final chapter of the discourse after the Last Supper forms an independent unit, often called ‘The high priestly prayer of Jesus’. It is a noble prayer focused on the approaching glorification of Jesus, and on Jesus’ intercession for the unity of his followers. In many ways it seems to be a meditation on the Lord’s Prayer, a prayer which is given in the Gospel according to Matthew but does not appear in the Fourth Gospel. Like the Lord’s Prayer it is addressed to the Father, who is directly addressed many times in this chapter. Instead of ‘may your name be held holy’ the glorification of the Father and the revelation of his Name are stressed, and to this is added the glorification of the Son as well. The Gospel according to John mentions the Kingdom of God only on one occasion (3.3, 5); the equivalent in this gospel is ‘eternal life’, which is prominent in this chapter. Instead of the prayer that the Father’s will may be done there is the constant refrain of the union of Father and Son in his life. The principal novelty is the air of fulfilment, the accomplishment of the Father’s plan for his Son. The Son is about to be raised to glory; he prays not so much for that as for his disciples, that those who have believed in him and accepted him may remain true to his Name and manifest his glory. |  |  | | --- | |  | |  | |

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