

**COMMENTARY ON READINGS FOR SUNDAY,
May 9, 2004 (Fifth Sunday of Easter)**

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The reading from Acts continues the account of the progress of the Church, which grows in numbers and is consolidated by its leaders, who exhort the faithful to persevere: one can enter the Kingdom of God only by passing through many tribulations. The Church is spreading in the pagan world; Jews have mostly rejected the Gospel, following instead their own religious leaders. The fact that the Church would be a mostly Gentile (former “pagans”) Church was a surprise to the earliest Christians, who saw God’s mysterious plan unfolding in this unexpected way.

The psalm reflects this compassion of God towards all, and praises him for it. The reading from the Book of Revelation looks ahead to the final unity or communion that will take place between God and his people; the image is that of the intimacy and joy of marriage. Note that Jerusalem is still the place where God dwells, as in the Hebrew Bible (or “Old Testament”). But in the new, eschatological order of the End Time, God will “place his tent” (dwell) with all redeemed humanity, who will be his people (a blessing spread from Israel to the rest of humanity). The slain but victorious Lamb (Jesus Christ, Rev 5:12) is inseparable from the ‘one seated upon the throne’ (Rev 6:16; 7:10; 22:1, 3), and is equally to be honored, Rev 5:13. Being ‘the first and the last’ (Isa 41:4; 44:6; 48:12) can be said of both God the Father and Jesus Christ his Son, Rev 1:8, 17-18; 2:8; 21:6; 22:13. Thus God has made all things new in and through Jesus.

The gospel reading couples two related things: Jesus’ glorification, which begins with his death in John’s gospel, and his new commandment: that we love one another as he has done, to the point of giving his life, John 15:12-13.