

Year A Seventh Sunday of Easter

Acts 1:12-14; Ps 27; 1 Pt 4:13-16; Jn 17:1-11

ROME. I have been in Rome since February on semester sabbatical from teaching Scripture at St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary in Boynton Beach. It has been a wonderful time; I am living in a mostly priestly residence and sometimes have breakfast with a Cardinal! I have a beautiful fifth-floor view of the historic center of Rome, all the way to the dome of St. Peter and to the angel atop Castel Sant'Angelo, and to the Gianicolo and the statue of Garibaldi as Italy celebrates the 150th anniversary of its unity.

This period has also coincided with Lent. It is wonderful to be able to choose from so many ancient and beautiful churches. Among my favorites are the "Chapel of the Miracle" at Sant'Andrea delle Frate, where Our Lady appeared to Alphonse Ratisbonne, who was Jewish; this is the church of the Minimi brethren of St. Francis of Paul. Then there's Gesù, St. Ignatius of Loyola's church, where he lived and is buried, with the chapel to la Madonna della Strada, where Pope Pius XII often prayed. And nearby to me, Santa Maria in Aquiro, which has the oldest painting of Bernadette before Our Lady of Lourdes. Lent was a time of purification and growth for me, and towards the end, I went on a brief but very meaningful pilgrimage to certain places of personal significance for me in the north of Italy and center of France, which I hope to include in these Sunday readings columns for the month of June.

This Sunday's readings are about being gathered together for prayer, which means being with God. The scene in Acts is beautiful: the early church is gathered, men and women together with Mary, Jesus' mother, and other members of his family. The psalm says that when one is with God, there is no fear; St. Thérèse of Lisieux said that trust is the only way to love. The psalm speaks of "hiding" in God's tent: we might say, in his temple, or in Jesus' Body, or in his side, as Catherine of Siena loved to say. In John's Gospel, we are told that eternal life is to know God: this is biblical language for intimacy. We are brought into knowing intimacy with God through his Son Jesus Christ, who was "glorified" on the Cross for us, taking us into the world of God although we remain in this human world. Thus we rejoice at belonging to him even when this means sharing also in his sufferings.

My pilgrimage began with a brief visit to St. Dominic's tomb in Bologna. I began my theological studies with the Dominicans. Then I went to Valdocco (Turin), home of St. John Bosco, after whom I take my middle name. There a friend gave me a new white papal rosary to replace the white rosary I lost after making my first communion in Havana.