

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Open a bible, light a candle beside it, and pray the gathering prayer below.

LEADER: I see the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. Its wall has 12 gates, three facing east, three facing north, three facing south, and three facing west.

Take turns naming the ethnic groups from whom you descend.

LEADER: We see no temple in the city of God.

ALL: The glory of the Holy One gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

With the month of May graduations and goodbyes begin. Some friends one never sees again. Some walk with us in our lives forever.

At graduations seniors are usually more than ready to leave high school. Adulthood glimmers on the horizon. Of course, we will miss the kids in the band, the lacrosse team, the calculus survivors, the cast of the musical. Next steps into college, jobs, or the armed services inevitably stretch the bonds we form in our teens—unless we are among those who find the perfect partner for life early.

I worked in food service at St. Catherine University and worked graduation at the end of my first year. The pomp and colorful academic regalia made me really

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

want to graduate. But no way did I realize how tough the goodbyes would be four years later. Some of these woman have remained lifelong friends, but on graduation day no one knows how the bonds we share will last.

Graduation still stirs me. Flags from nations around the world fly at the edges of the quad. The music starts, the faculty lead a march to the auditorium. Two by two hundreds of graduates stream down the sidewalks. Parents and family watch for their own. Two hours later it's all over and friends scatter around the globe. The event jams congratulations and goodbye together.

Leave taking is a part of caring about those we love. Parents fly across the continent to take leave of sons and daughters when they finish basic training and ship out for months. Hugs have to store up presence for the long absences ahead.

Ultimately we face final leave takings as Jesus does in Sunday's gospel. Often the words we exchange in these moments



become words we live from into the future. We commit to care for those left behind. We say a final, "I love you." My mom told my dad near her death, "You can do it," continue caring for us all.

In John's gospel, and only in this gospel, Jesus shares a long leave-taking with his disciples. It begins in John 13.31 after Judas leaves the room where they are gathered for the last supper. It continues for four chapters.

Jesus anticipates his absence and comforts his disciples. "Don't let your hearts be troubled," he says. He and the Father will be at home in those who live the words he leaves them.

● What parting moments and words do you treasure in your memory?



GOSPEL

The Spirit will help us remember Jesus' teachings.

JESUS 1: Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them. To them we will come and make our home with them.

JESUS 2: Those who do not love me do not keep my words. Yet the words you hear are not mine but from the Father, who sent me.

JESUS 3: These things I have told you while I am still with you. The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and help you remember all that I told you.

JESUS 1: Peace I leave to you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives, do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or fearful.

JESUS 2: You have heard me say, "I go away, and I come back to you." If you truly loved me, you would rejoice that I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.

JESUS 3: Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe.

John 14.23-29



Where does the Spirit of Jesus live?

Jesus prepares his friends for his absence while he is still with them. In a conversation that takes place just before Sunday's gospel, Thomas, Philip, and Judas ask Jesus questions and receive words to live by for themselves and for us. Thomas wants to know where Jesus is going, so he can know the way. To him, Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (14.7)

Philip asks, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." To him, Jesus explains a little impatiently, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (14.9).

A little later Judas, the son of James, asks the question to which Sunday's gospel is the answer. He

asks, "How is it that you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?" This question touches on the mystery of who believes. Some see in Jesus' actions the works of God. Some see the same actions but don't believe.

The power Jesus reveals is not military strength like that of the Roman legions but love. Jesus reveals the word his followers must keep at the last supper when he gives them two commands. First, he washes their feet as an example and tells them, "As I have done, so you must do." Then, second, between prophecies that Judas will betray him and Peter will deny him, Jesus directs, "Such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for one another."

Jesus has demonstrated the words his friends must keep—love one another as he has loved them and will love them to the end on the cross.

● What question would you ask Jesus?

● What gospel words do you live by?

Israel's wisdom writings insist God is knowable in creation. Wisdom begins in awe and wonder. It is always looking for a home, a dwelling place among the human race. Wisdom finds a home in Israel and wherever people recognize that creation comes from the hand of God. The Wisdom of Solomon says human knowledge or wisdom is "a breath of the power of God, ... a spotless mirror of the workings of God" (7.26).

Jesus mirrors in his words and deeds who God is, just as wisdom mirrors the creator. Jesus and his Father make a home with those who live his teachings and follow his example. Jesus' love for his friends unites them with him and his Father.

Where Jesus lives is a question that arises early in John's gospel. When John the Baptist points out Jesus to Andrew and another of his disciples, they follow Jesus, who asks them what they are looking for. "Where are you staying?" they ask (1.39). The word *stay* can mean *to abide, to reside, to continue in memory*. Jesus invites them to come and see. In his farewell at the last supper he readies his friends for his new staying power.

By the time Jesus takes his leave, where he lives is clear. Wherever his friends lay down their lives for one another as he is about to on the cross. Wherever they serve one another humbly as he has done rather than lord or lady it over one another like earthly leaders. Where his friends love one

another, they reveal God as Jesus does. They continue his work in the world.

● How do you answer the question today, "Where does Jesus live?"

● Where do you experience awe in God's presence?

This gospel tells us that when people live like Jesus, they discover Jesus and the Father within them. We learn and relearn Jesus' message from living it. Jesus comes as a friend, an equal who does not exempt himself from the conditions of human life but lives them to the end, facing death on the cross at the hands of empire.

Friendship is a joyful, free attraction, a delight in each others' company. Common vision brings friends together. The love of friends always has room for more; it is an inclusive love, mutual, reciprocal. Friends are not dependent on each other but are responsible to each other.

Friends trust each other. Betrayal is the way we sin against a friend. Sharing a meal and conversation are common activities of friends. To invite people to eat is to invite them to share something of one's own with them. The Spirit befriends us from within and lives within us, breath by breath, as companion and advocate.

● What do you appreciate about Christians understanding themselves as friends of God?

● What best describes your relationship with Jesus—friend, disciple, follower, servant?



The community resolves a conflict.

Sunday's first reading recounts how the Church handled its first major problem—whether Gentiles should keep the law of Moses and all the men be circumcised. The people of the ancient world respected Jews for their worship of one God and high moral standards.

The law of Moses gave Jews identity as a community and respect among Gentiles. Christian Jews continued to keep the law and many wanted Gentiles to keep the law in order to become Christians.

Acts reports the results of the first Church council, which took place in Jerusalem. Christians on both sides of the question met face to face. The



group came to a unanimous decision and testified the Spirit worked in them. They elected representatives to deliver their decision to those affected.

The Jerusalem Council

Some men came down to Antioch from Judea and began to teach the community: "Unless you are circumcised according to Mosaic practice, you cannot be saved." After much discord and controversy between them and Paul and Barnabas, Paul, Barnabas, and some others decided to go see the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about this question.

The apostles and elders resolved in agreement with the whole Jerusalem church to send representatives to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. Those chosen were leading men of the community, Judas, known as Barnabas, and Silas. They were to deliver this letter:

"The apostles, the elders, and the community send greetings to the brothers and sisters of Gentile origin in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. Since we have heard that some of our number whom we did not send have upset you with their

discussions and disturbed your peace of mind, we resolved unanimously to choose representatives and send them to you along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, who have dedicated themselves to our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Those whom we are sending you are Judas and Silas, who will convey this message by word of mouth: 'It seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to lay on you any burden beyond that which is strictly necessary, namely, to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals, and from illicit sexual union. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.'"

Acts 15.1-2,22-29

- How do the proceedings of the first Church council compare and contrast with the way your parish council makes decisions?
- How are the struggles of the earliest Christians like those going on in the Church today between Catholics who embrace the reforms of the Second Vatican Council and those who are restoring the pre-Vatican II Church?

PRAY

Take a little quiet time to surface your own concerns and commitments for the week.

LEADER: I see the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

ALL: People come from the north to its gates.

Turn north and pray for the struggles of people in the north.

ALL: People come from the east to its gates.

Turn east and pray for the struggles of people in the east.

ALL: People come from the south to its gates.

Turn south and pray for the struggles of people in the south.

ALL: People come from the west to its gates.

Turn west and pray for the struggles of people in the west.

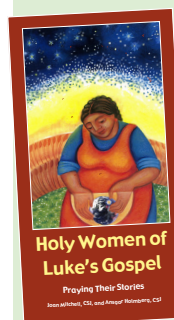
ALL: The glory of God gives us light, and our lamp is the Lamb.



DO SOMETHING



- Practice welcoming Sabbath. Sunday, Christian Sabbath, is made for humans to take a break, to experience God's presence in rocks and rills, flowers and firs, in the far horizon of sea or prairie or the view from mountain vista.
- Welcome neighbors to a Sunday evening dinner.



Holy Women of Luke's Gospel: Praying Their Stories

Holy Women, Full of Grace: A Litany of Women in Mark's Gospel



You will want these books for your own and for sharing.

Order at goodgroundpress.com or call 800-232-5533.

1-10 copies, \$8.00; 11-99, \$7.00; 100 or more, \$5.50.