

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 2:14a,36-41

NRSV

Peter now comes to the conclusion of his speech to the Jerusalem crowd, in which he interprets the event they have just witnessed: the coming of the Holy Spirit. In vv. 16-21, he has shown (from the book of Joel) that the end times, and therefore salvation, are at hand. He shows how we have access to salvation: it is through Jesus, whom God has made “both Lord and Messiah” (v. 36). It is imperative that those who hear may receive new life in Christ.

Peter’s words about the crowd’s responsibility for Jesus’ death stuns his hearers: “they were cut to the heart” (v. 37), but rather than being turned off, they ask “what should we do?”. In spite of the dark deed of their past, he urges them to undergo a radical change of heart (“Repent”, v. 38) to serving the living God, to be “baptised ... in the name of Jesus”. Then their sins will be forgiven and they will receive the Holy Spirit (as promised by God through Joel), a promise open to “everyone” (v. 39) whom God calls and who call upon God (v. 21). “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation” (v. 40) is like Joel’s call. Many (“about three thousand”, v. 41, a round number) respond and are baptised; they are “added” to the 120 believers (1:15) for whom salvation has already begun; they are saved from the sin of rejecting the Messiah. They *devote themselves* to learning from the apostles, to “fellowship” (v. 42), participating in the Eucharist, and prayer.

Psalms 116:1-4,12-19

NRSV

The psalmist tells the congregation why he loves God: “he has heard my voice”. Because God helped him in his time of “distress and anguish” (v. 3, serious illness), he will “call on him” (v. 2) for the rest of his life. He was near death; he felt life slipping away. (“Sheol”, v. 3, was the place of the dead. People believed that it *ensnared* those gravely ill.) When he called on God for help (v. 4), God “delivered ... [me] from [near] death” (v. 8). (Vv. 5-6 are a lesson for those present; the “simple” are those who are direct, rather than devious, with God.) Even when afflicted, he kept his faith in God (v. 10). He now *walks before the Lord* (v. 9, follows God’s ways). How can he pay back God for saving him? (v. 12) He will make a drink-offering in the Temple for his deliverance and “call on the name of the Lord” (v. 13) in thanksgiving, in the presence of the worshipping community (v. 14). God almost always preserves the lives of the faithful (v. 15). He sees his status with God as being like a “child of your serving girl” (v. 16, one in perpetual servitude) but God makes him a free man (“loosed my bonds”). The “house of the LORD” (v. 19) is the Temple.

1 Peter 1:17-23

NRSV

The author has urged his readers: “discipline yourselves” (v. 13), be ready for

Christ’s second coming. Do not fall back into the pagan immorality you practised before your conversion to the faith; rather, separate yourselves from such ways: live ethically.

Now he warns that being a child of God requires that you hold him in proper respect, in “reverent fear” (v. 17) – while your ethics marginalise you from the pagan world around you (“exile”). God paid for your freedom from pagan ways (as one might *ransom*, v. 18, prisoners of war) not with “perishable” things but with the life of Christ. (In the Jewish idea of sacrifice, “blood”, v. 19, represented life).

Especially at Passover, the lamb sacrificed had to be perfect, as Jesus was. The crucifixion is very valuable (“precious”). God planned redemption through Christ from before his creative act (“destined”, v. 20); with Christ’s life, the final stage of history has begun (“end of the ages”). God raised Jesus to “glory” (v. 21, the sublime majesty and radiant splendour of God). Through him you have come to “trust”, “faith and hope” in God. “Purified your souls” (v. 22) probably refers to baptism, when one confesses the faith, “obedience to the truth”. Through baptism one attains true “mutual love”. The Christian is “born anew” (v. 23) in baptism through the creative “word of God”, the gospel, which “endures forever” (v. 25). Baptism brings us to a new way of living.

Luke 24:13-35

NRSV

It is later on Easter Day, the day on which Mary Magdalene and the other women have discovered the empty tomb. As two of Jesus’ followers walk to Emmaus, they talk about the day’s news, the recent startling events. Eusebius, the first church historian, tells us that “Cleopas” (v. 18) was a relative of Jesus. The two do not recognize our Lord. Jesus asks “What things?” (v. 19). Their reply shows the limitations of their understanding of who Jesus is: they do realize that he is a prophet and, like Moses, “mighty in deed and word”, but they have no idea how much more he is. Jesus has disappointed them: they expected him to deliver Israel from Roman domination, and to begin an earthly kingdom of God (“redeem Israel”, v. 21). Three days have passed (long enough, in Jewish belief, for the soul to have left the body) and, despite Jesus’ statement that he would be raised from death, nothing has happened! The women told us that he is alive, but when Peter and John went there, all they saw was the empty tomb! (v. 24).

Jesus tells them how slow they are to grasp how the Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled in him. Was it not God’s plan (“necessary”, v. 26) that Jesus should be crucified and ascend to be with the Father? He interprets his life as a fulfilment of all of Scripture, from “Moses” (v. 27, the first five books of the Bible) to “all the prophets”. The meal seems to be a Eucharist: “he took bread, blessed and broke it” (v. 30). Then, from Jesus’ interpretation and their hospitality to this “stranger” (v. 18) “their eyes were opened” (v. 31), i.e. they develop a deeper understanding of who Jesus is, that he is divine. At the Last Supper, Jesus said he would not again share food with his disciples until God’s kingdom came. He has now eaten with the two, so the Kingdom has indeed come. “The Lord has risen indeed ... !” (v. 34).

