

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER
(No one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God)

Dearly beloved:

Next Sunday, May 21st is the Fifth Sunday after Easter. The Holy Gospel reading for this Sunday is about the opposition of Samaritans to Jesus and His disciples and the costs of following God's way for Jesus. When the ultimate time approached for Jesus to be taken up to heaven, He wanted to go to Jerusalem from Galilee for Passover. There are two ways to go to Jerusalem, one is three times as long, that is, around Jordan and through Jericho; the other route is a shortcut, through Samaria. They wanted to take the shortcut and Jesus sent messengers before they started the trip to make sure their journey through their city was safe. The Jews always take the longer route to avoid encountering Samaritans, a mixed tribe, whom they hated. Jesus did not hate the Samaritans but the Samaritans did not give due honour to Jesus, because He is a Jew, and was on the way to Jerusalem. The lack of respect for Jesus that was shown by the Samaritans angered the disciples, and John and James wanted to punish them. Jesus reminded them that retaliation belongs to God and destruction is not the spirit of those who are following Him or any Christian.

Thus, they went to Jerusalem through Jordan, the longest route. On their way, Jesus met three would-be followers. The first man said to Jesus, I am willing to follow you wherever you go. Jesus replied to him by saying that foxes and birds are safe and secure in their own den and nests where they live, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head. He asked the second person to follow Him; but his reply was that his father just died and he wanted to bury him. Jesus said to him, let the spiritually dead bury those who are physically dead and also told him to go and proclaim the kingdom of God. Here Jesus is talking about priorities. The third man said he is willing to follow Jesus but first he wanted to say goodbye to his family. Jesus told him that there is no room in heaven for those who are looking back. Jesus also used the illustration of someone ploughing a field. If the ploughman looks back, the plough goes all over the place. Similarly, when we are driving a car, we should not look backwards at a child seated in the back, because we will divert our attention from the wheel and that can cause a serious accident.

There is no doubt that the above three would be followers who wanted to follow Jesus for prestige and positions, but did not want to face the challenges. That's why all those three men left with nothing. But the Gospel does not record the response from these three would-be followers. They all approached Jesus with dreams to become great. Some people will do anything and go any where for power and influence. A similar situation can be seen in the bible when God tells Elijah to anoint a young man his successor as prophet to the nation of Israel; Elijah responded by saying 'let me kiss my parents and then I will follow you. The scripture never says whether Elijah actually did as he had suggested.

When the Lord calls us to follow Him, He demands sacrifice. Jesus is rejected by the Jews and at the same time, He is rejected by the Samaritans and others because He is a Jew. Yet, he did not harbor revenge in His heart. "O Lord, take and receive our entire liberty and all we possess that You have given us and continue to give us only Your grace and love; with these we will be rich enough and we will desire nothing more".

Please read the following Bible verses, in preparation for this Sunday's commemoration.

Bible readings for Sunday, May 21st, 2006.

(Fifth Sunday after Easter)

Before Holy Qurbana:

Deuteronomy	-	16: 1-8
Joshua	-	8: 30-35
Isaiah	-	54: 1-8

Holy Qurbana

General Epistles:	I Peter	- 3: 17-22
Epistles of St. Paul:	Hebrews	- 11: 32-40
Holy Gospel:	St. Luke	- 9: 51-62

See you on Sunday, May 21st at 8.45 a.m. Please be punctual.

Importance of Next Week.

1. For all the member's convenience, we are celebrating the perunnal of our Lord's "Ascension" on Wednesday, May 24th at 6.30 p.m.
2. Next Sunday, May 28th is "Sunday Before Pentecost".

With prayers,
Thomas Alex