

7th Sunday of Easter, Cycle C
Acts of the Apostles 7:55-60
Psalm 97:1-2, 6-7, 9
Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20
John 17:20-26
May 8, 2016
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The Garaventa Center
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When, as a young priest, I was a graduate student in the UK, I lived and worked in a big Catholic parish in downtown Cambridge. The parish was Our Lady and the English Martyrs, but it was usually called “OLEM” - an acronym of its initials. I quickly came to love OLEM, and the parishioners took me to their hearts, but my relationship with the parish really took shape when my mother came to visit. I am one of eight children, so my parents had little time or money for international travel. My mother’s visit to Cambridge was her first outside the United States. At the time of the visit she was already ill, so until the last moment there was doubt as to whether she’d be able to travel. But the day came, and she arrived, beaming, and filled with a spirit of adventure. From the first moment, the parishioners treated her like a queen – and they know how to treat a queen over there. They presented her with the largest bouquet of flowers she had ever received, and showered her with dinner invitations. Let me share just one incident from her visit that affords a glimpse of how things went.

Sr. Scholastica was a religious in a convent where I often said Mass. She was tall, thin, gracious and learned. The latter quality came to the fore when she needed cataract surgery. The National Health doctors asked her why, at her advanced age, she required such surgery. She told

them it was so she could continue her study of ancient Greek. When I introduced my mother to her, Sr. Scholastica curtseyed. It brought tears to my eyes.

I've done a fair amount of travelling, and I've seen some remarkable things. But much of the time, when I saw those things, I was alone. If I'm alone when I see something wonderful, like a fishing village on the coast of Maine, the city of Chicago from the air at night, or the interior of King's College Chapel, if I'm *alone* when I see these things, I don't experience them with the same intensity I do when I see them with someone I care about.

When I'm alone there can be a certain distance -- a kind of separateness -- between the experience and me. Somehow I'm standing on the outside looking in. But when I see the same things with friends, or especially with family, the experience is different. I feel more like I'm really there. It's all more integrated somehow. I'm no longer outside looking in. I suppose the experience has its roots in childhood, when the colorful stone, or beetle or piece of driftwood you've just found, somehow isn't officially certified as real and valuable until it has been fussed over, or at least perfunctorily glanced at, by Mom or Dad. "Yes, that's very nice Charlie. Now go wash your hands."

So sharing OLEM with my mother, and through her with my family, helped me experience the parish more deeply, and, I suspect, made me a better priest for its people.

Today's Gospel brings these memories to mind. In the Gospel passage, Jesus is praying for *us* - for those who will come to believe in him through the words of his disciples. And this is what he asks for us: "that they may be one, [Father] as we are one, I in them and you in me,

that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me.” So, in Christ, we are all united with one another, and through Christ we are united with the very Godhead!

That means, in effect, we are never alone. We need never feel alienated from our experience. What happens to one of us happens to all of us, and happens *in* Christ. What better way to experience the world, and each other, than through the one who created it all? In Christ, we needn't feel separate from our experience. We are no longer outsiders, looking in. And we are *always* with someone who loves us.