

Reflection for 5th Sunday of Easter

Acts 9:26-31

1 John 3:18-24

Gospel John 15:1-8



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Finding the spirit of the still strange, risen Lord.

Today Saul enters the picture and with him violence. The Jerusalem community are scared of him. His recent Damascus conversion does nothing to allay their fears. We get a more accurate insight into the internal fragility of the early community; not yet fully confident in the abiding spirit of their, still strange, risen Lord. Saul arrives and the kindly Barnabas mediates on his behalf. He tells of the vision of the risen Jesus and Saul's remarkable recent attempt at preaching Jesus, as Messiah, in Damascus. They are wary.

Paul is young and confident with a detailed knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures which he can quote, at will, from memory. At ease in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek he is able to argue with all-comers. Immediately he starts wandering the city, preaching in the name of Jesus, as though he were an Apostle. They can't cope with him. To make matters worse he upsets the Greek-speaking Jewish disciples, with whom he should have had more in common. The uneasy balance of the community disintegrates as the Greeks plan to kill him. There is a disturbing upsurge of violence here that shows just how hard-won would be the more contemplative account in John's gospel of all as members of Christ, the one vine.

They hustle Saul to the coast and put him on a boat to Tarsus, back to the family tent-making business, nearly a thousand miles away. We hear no more of him for ten years. But in those years the full significance of the Risen Lord's 'Why are you persecuting me?' will become clear. Saul, as Paul, will return with his teaching of the Church, as the body of Christ, in which each one of us can find a welcoming home, and a unique role, despite our past.



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