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Detail from "The Banjo Lesson" (1893), an oil on canvas painting by Henry Ossawa Tanner (Wikimedia Commons)



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Last week, our readings encouraged us to "continue on the way." Now we hear that our Christian life, our life in Christ and the Spirit is a process rather than an accomplishment.

First, we hear of Deacon Philip among the Samaritans. Samaria was an iffy location for preaching the Gospel. During Jesus' lifetime, a [Samaritan town refused him hospitality](#) because he was going to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51-56). On the other hand, a [Samaritan woman, Photina](#), listened to him and brought her whole town to believe in him (John 4:4-42).

Philip's success in Samaria turned out to be ambiguous. The people listened to him, he apparently baptized them in the name of Jesus, but they did not experience the presence of the Holy Spirit until Peter and John prayed with them and laid hands on them. Sometimes it takes a team to evangelize successfully.

## **Sixth Sunday of Easter**

[May 10, 2026](#)

Acts 8:5-8, 14-17

Psalm 66

1 Peter 3:15-18

John 14:15-21

This story serves as a prelude to today's selection from Jesus' last discourse (John 14-17). Between the Gospels for last and this week, the lectionary skips over the two verses in which Jesus pledges that he will do anything that disciples ask in his name. These verses lead into Jesus' promise that they will receive his Spirit, whom he calls the "Advocate, the Spirit of Truth."

John the Evangelist loves circling his themes, almost like a merry-go-round, inviting us to see things anew in their connection with everything else and then to see it all again with ever-greater insight. In this section, John has Jesus explain that the coming Spirit dwells in the Father, animates Jesus himself, and will inhabit Jesus' disciples in a new way after the world no longer experiences Jesus as the Word

Incarnate.

As we ride the merry-go-round of Christian life, we realize that we can remain always in the process, always growing in our identity in Christ, the Father and the Spirit. That's the unwittingly daring proclamation we make each time we begin a prayer or activity, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Although we rarely take in the immensity of those phrases, they express our faith in all that Jesus is teaching in his long Last Supper discourse.

The entire discourse, with all its twists and turns, aims at leading us to grasp the reality that we are in God and God in us. John wants us to understand that Jesus' life, death and resurrection have changed history, that our goal in life is union in God, and that Sophia, the Spirit of God, will dwell in us to the extent that we allow her to.

Jesus explains our freedom to accept or avoid the gift when he calls us to keep his commandments. What does he command? To love and serve and embrace our unity with one another through, with and in Christ.

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This message sounds heady, too big to take in. At the same time, it is as simple as washing one another's feet. The love Christ talks about is not primarily an emotion, but an embrace of our shared identity as creatures, human beings invited into the same life, the same depth, the same identity in God.

Moving toward living this love in full is possible only with the aid of the Spirit of Truth who leads us to understand who we are together and where we have the capacity to go. The Spirit of Truth, the one who advocates with us in the name of God, will lead us to experience the humility proper to our condition — a humility that rejoices in all God hopes for us and that draws us ever more deeply into Christ's mission of love.

We might think this way of life is possible only for people like Thomas Merton, Teresa of Ávila and the Little Flower. Christ promises that it is within the reach of each and every one of us.

We see it illustrated in Henry Ossawa Tanner's painting "The Banjo Lesson," which depicts an elderly man holding a child on his lap to teach him the art of playing the music of their African heritage. The painting depicts love and relationship in a

shared endeavor, the passing on of a heritage and the process of learning that we can only accomplish together. Every act of love like this deepens our participation in the life of God.

The Letter of Peter tells us to be ready to explain our reasons for hope. Although prone to see more lack than abundance, we can develop the vision that recognizes God working in and through our universe and our neighbors in banjo lessons, sharing food or working together for justice.

Let us continue on the way of recognizing the wonder of the Spirit of God at work among us.