



a Kendall Hunt Company

## Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year C, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



### Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for the session, read all the readings.

Acts 7:55-60

Psalm 97:1-2, 6-7, 9

Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20

John 17:20-26

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Was there a particular reading which appealed to you? Was there a word or image that engaged you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need for the session.

### The Word In Liturgy

The account of Stephen's martyrdom in Acts serves two of Luke's theological purposes. First, it models the death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, upon that of Jesus. Stephen, like Jesus, is accused of blasphemy and betrayed by false witnesses, enrages his persecutors by speaking of the coming Son of Man, commends his spirit to the Lord, and forgives those who put him to death. These parallels strongly suggest that those who believe in Jesus will indeed conform to the pattern of his death, as the early community struggled against persecution. Second, the narrative of the stoning of Stephen introduces Saul in an uncompromisingly villainous role.

Stephen's magnificent, Spirit-filled vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of God possesses a subtle significance: rather than being seated, the Son of Man is standing, which is a position of an advocate at a trial. Stephen has had no fair trial. His human enemies have perjured themselves and wrought his execution as a mob without the sentencing of the Sanhedrin. But before God, who alone judges justly, Stephen finds his true advocate and bears witness to him.

Today's passage from John's gospel is the last section of the majestic prayer, which concludes Jesus' farewell discourse at the Last Supper. Here, in a section, which has a marked future orientation, Jesus prays for unity among all those who will someday come to faith through the words of his disciples. The unity for which Jesus prays is to be like the unity of the Father with Jesus himself. Two features of it are especially noteworthy. First, this unity finds its origin in God; the very fact that Jesus prays for it suggests that it is not available through human striving or natural associations alone. Second, it cannot be a purely spiritual unity, for it must be enough in evidence that it will confront the world with a powerful truth: "So shall the world know that you sent me, and that you loved them as you loved me."

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### **Catholic Doctrine**

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#### ***Christian Unity***

Ecumenism is the movement to achieve unity among all the Christian churches. The word in English derives from biblical Greek, *oikoumene*, “the whole inhabited earth.” In obedience to the prayer of Jesus proclaimed in this Sunday’s gospel passage (“that they may all be one”), Christians of many churches have worked to manifest greater unity.

The Catholic Church teaches that unity is a gift given to the Church by Christ (CCC 820). Its source is the Trinity, the union of God, one in three (CCC 813). The gift of unity does not mean uniformity. From its beginning, the Church has been characterized by a great diversity and liveliness. Yet for various reasons, including human sinfulness, the one church of Jesus Christ has experienced deep divisions and separations (schisms) which weaken our witness in the world. The Second Vatican Council teaches that none of the churches are exempt from taking responsibility for the scandal of this separated condition (UR 1).

The drive toward ecumenism began early in the twentieth century by non-Catholic Christians and was embraced by the Catholic Church in the years prior to the Second Vatican Council. In 1949, the Holy Office issued an instruction endorsing Catholic participation in conferences whose aim was the promotion of ecumenism. Subsequently, Catholic observers attended meetings of the World Council of Churches, and Protestant and Orthodox observers were invited and attended the Vatican II. Indeed, ecumenism was one of the four principal goals of the Second Vatican Council. With the publication of the Decree on Ecumenism in 1964 (*Unitatis Redintegratio*) the Catholic Church became irrevocably committed to ecumenism.

Does the Catholic Church believe, therefore, that all churches are equal and the differences between them unimportant? By no means. The Constitution on the Church affirmed that the church of Jesus Christ “subsists in the Catholic Church” (LG 8) and that all means of salvation have been given to the Catholic Church by Christ, even though we do not always live by them as we should. In the Catholic view, non-Catholic churches are objectively wounded by not having certain elements, such as the Petrine ministry, apostolic succession, valid sacraments, or profession of the one faith received from the apostles.

In 1995, John Paul II issued an encyclical letter, *Ut Unum Sint*, in which he makes his own contribution to the ecumenical movement. Common prayer, spiritual renewal and conversion will result in one family, in that Christians will cease seeing each other as enemies or strangers and instead as “brothers and sisters” (UUS, 42.1). He urges us to be authentic disciples, true to the prayer of Jesus that we all may be one.