

**Readings:** Acts 1:15 – 17,20 – 26; Ps 102 (103):1,2,11,12,19,20; 1 John 4: 11 – 16; John 17:11 – 19.

Today's Reading from the *Acts of the Apostles* is the same as the first reading for last Friday's Feast of Saint Matthias the Apostle – see the Reflection for that day.

*On this Sunday (as on the Seventh Sunday of Eastertide each year) the Gospel Reading is part of the prayer of Jesus which ends his addresses to the disciples at the Last Supper. It would be good to read the whole of chapter 17 before studying this week's section.*

The major theme of today's section is the divine protection of the disciples. Jesus says that, while he was with them, he *watched over* those the Father had given him, and that the only one lost had been Judas, *who chose to be lost*. But now he is about to leave them, and, knowing that they will be in hated as he has been hated, he prays that the Father will take over the task of protection.

This prayer is not only for the apostles gathered in the upper room – it is for all who follow them as disciples throughout the ages – right down to our own day.

The Fourth Evangelist was probably writing many years after the events he describes. In that time Christians have experienced persecution, first from those Jewish leaders who refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah, and then from the Roman authorities. He sees all this as the work of *the Evil One*, and he knows that, as long as the world continues, all Christians will be in danger.

And so it has been: some have been, and some still are, hated and persecuted even to death.

For most of us physical persecution seems remote – something that happens to other people, in another time or another place. But *the Evil One* has more weapons at his disposal than physical persecution. Among the ways we may be under attack are these: -

a temptation to take our faith for granted and to think we need make no particular effort to deepen or defend it;

a risk, as we get older, of growing weary – or even bored – in our prayer and worship;

a feeling that the Church has made no lasting difference to the world, which continues on its self-centred way.

Against all these attacks Christ, whose victory we celebrate in the mysteries of Easter and the Ascension, still prays for us, as he did for his first disciples.

Let us co-operate with his prayer, lest we fall away and become one who *chose to be lost*.