

6th Sunday of Easter - C
Acts 15:1-2, 22-29;
Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23 ;
John 14:23-29
Little Flower - 5/26/19

My Brothers and Sisters,

If last week's readings showed us two models of the Church, today's readings give us valuable insights into the lived reality of the Church.

Today's first reading tells the story of one of the first major conflicts in the Church and one of the first major decisions of the Church to be inclusive. Was the Church to be only for the Jews or also for Gentiles? When the Christians in Antioch could not resolve the dispute, they sent representatives to Jerusalem to consult with the apostles and elders. Today's reading, however, leaves out the second part of the story: the Council of Jerusalem. The second part of today's reading, the letter to the Gentile "*brothers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia*" contains the decisions of the Council.

It seems to me that this story teaches us three important lessons about Church. First, the unity of the Church is critically important. However, from the very beginning of the Church, there were disagreements and conflicts about Church teaching and practice. In every age, the challenge faced by the Church is how to resolve disagreements and conflicts and maintain Church unity. Today, because of websites and social media, the disagreements and conflicts are magnified and made personal with attacks on Pope Francis, cardinals, archbishops, and bishops. Cardinal Raymond Burke once said to me that it was not the disagreements and conflicts among Catholics that bothered him but the lack of charity when Catholics disagree with one another.

Second, when they could not resolve the conflict, they referred it to the leaders of the Church in Jerusalem. In other words, they understood that they were part of a larger church. As Catholics, we run the risk of being parochial, i.e., of living in our parish bubble and forgetting that we are part of a worldwide church. Because the Church in the United States has been so strong and so wealthy relative to some other countries, we are often tempted to believe that our church issues are everyone's issues or that our issues are the most important issues in the Church.

Third, at the Council of Jerusalem, the Church opted to be an inclusive rather than an exclusive church. In their response, the Council of Jerusalem tried to limit the burdens on the people. How welcoming are we today as a parish and as a Church? Jesus said, "*Go and learn the meaning of the words, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' I did not come to call the righteous but sinners*" [Mt. 9:13]. As a parish and as the Catholic Church, do we welcome both saints and sinners?

Today's reading from Revelation reminds us of what it means to be an apostolic Church. Jesus built the Church on the foundation of the apostles. Their ministry continues in the Church today through the Pope and the bishops. When we talk about Tradition (with a capital T), we are talking about the living faith of the Church handed down from the Apostles. Today's Gospel contains Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit who would teach the apostles everything and remind them of all that he told them. This verse supports the Catholic understanding of Tradition (with a capital T). In other words, although Jesus was the fullness of God's revelation, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in union with the Pope and the bishops, the Church is always called to reflect on and deepen its understanding of God's revelation.

My brothers and sisters, in the midst of all the divisions within society and the Church, Jesus' promise in the Gospel of the gift of his peace, a peace the world cannot give, is comforting. The world can only give some measure of external harmony and peace. Jesus' peace is an inner peace that flows from the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of God's love in Jesus Christ.