

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's readings offer us practical insights into our lived experience of Church.

Christians often tend to idealize the earliest days of the Church. For example, on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles as tongues of fire. Immediately the apostles went out and began to preach. We are told that they added 3000 new members that day. The Acts of the Apostles even suggests that the early Church was almost ideal:

*They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.... All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need [Acts 2:42, 44-45].*

All of us would like our parish community and the larger Church to be as ideal as the early Church was. However, passages such as this present an ideal of the Church that was never realized. From the beginning, there were disagreements, conflicts, and divisions within the Church, the biggest of which were whether Gentiles should be allowed to become Christians and, if so, under what conditions. This conflict triggered the Council of Jerusalem, part of which is described in today's reading from Acts.

This reading offers a couple of truths about the church as it really is. We should not be surprised or scandalized when there are disagreements, conflicts, and divisions within the church or parish. Because the church is made up of people, the church will never be a perfect community. If this is true of the church, it is even more true of the other communities of which we are part. Also, it is very easy for us to forget that we are part of a larger church. When the question of Gentiles becoming Christian came up, there referred the matter to the larger church by going up to Jerusalem to discuss it with the apostles and elders. In the Creed, we always say we believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Our unity with the Archdiocese and with the Catholic Church throughout the world is important to us as a parish.

Today's reading from Revelation gives us another view of the kingdom of God. It, too, suggests at least two truths. First, it reminds us that the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles. One could argue that this passage also emphasizes the church's catholicity because there are three gates facing each direction suggesting that God's kingdom and the church are open to all peoples.

Second, in John's vision, there was "*no temple in the city for its temple is the Lord God almighty and the Lamb.*" This is a powerful reminder that the church is not primarily a building but a people. The Church is the community of those called to believe in Jesus, to celebrate faith sacramentally, and to share faith and serve others. The church is holy to the extent that it does these things.

Today's Gospel comes from Jesus' discourse at the Last Supper in John's Gospel. In this Gospel, Jesus promised that God would send the Holy Spirit who would teach them all things and remind them of all that Jesus had told them. When Jesus said he would give them a peace unlike the world gives, he was suggesting his peace was an inner peace, a peace in one's spirit rather than the absence of conflict.

My brothers and sisters, perhaps the most important line in today's Gospel is "*Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.*" Although the pandemic is not what it was, I think many of us are troubled and afraid of so many things. Right now, if it is not the pandemic, it is the economy. Somewhere I read something about how many times in different ways Jesus tells us in the Gospel not to be afraid. One my favorite Gospel verses also comes from Jesus' Last Supper discourse: "*In the world you will have trouble, but be brave: I have conquered the world*" [16:33, JB 1967].