

Sixth Sunday of Easter C2025

After the resurrection of our Lord, the early Church grew through the work of the Apostles, especially that of Paul and Barnabas among the gentiles. That growth, however, brought some problems and tensions inside the community.

Would the new converts be only baptized or should they also be circumcised in respect of the Law of Moses? It was a tough issue the Church faced in its beginning. To resolve the matter, it was decided that Paul, Barnabas and some of them would go to Jerusalem to confer with the apostles and the elders. From that meeting a consensus was reached that, to facilitate their interaction with Christians of Jewish background, only baptism and few laws were important for the gentiles.

The discussion over what to observe by Gentiles joining the Church shows that there is a distinction between the content of the message of our Lord and the way a culture expresses it. Nobody has the right to impose his way of praying on others as if it were the only possible way. When we try to impose our own views and traditions on others, we overlook the central place the word of our Lord plays in Christian community.

The fact that Paul and Barnabas referred to the Apostles in Jerusalem, instead of resolving the problem by themselves, is a sign that the Church is not a private business. The Church, indeed, is a structured body that has a hierarchy whose role is to guide and gather all the believers in fidelity to the spirit and the word of our Lord. Such a process clarifies the importance of ecumenical Councils in the history of the Church and the role of leadership the pope plays in the Church.

To resolve the conflict, the apostles refer to the words “the Holy Spirit and us”, which means the Holy Spirit and the college of the apostles. These are two important instances without which the work of the Church becomes a pure human business. However, the Holy Spirit does not act magically. It is only through prayer and the patient listening to the word of our Lord that the Spirit speaks to our heart, allows us to come to discernment and good decisions. Otherwise we will be misleading by taking our emotions for spiritual insights, our personal desires for the truth to impose on others.

The Holy Spirit is strengthened in us only when we love our Lord and keep his word. Love is the basis of everything. The Father loves our Lord and our Lord loves us. Without keeping his word, there is no way of loving him. That word we keep is not just our Lord’s word, but that of his Father who has sent him into the world.

When we keep our Lord’s word, there is a circularity of relationship of love that goes from our Lord to us, from us to the Father, and from the Father to our Lord and to us. Then, our Lord and his Father can make their dwelling within us, because we love them. In turn, we become, each one in particular, a space where God dwells, a home to the Lord. What a challenge than to be a home to the Lord! What an effort it requires to be that shelter to the Lord!

Thus, we understand why the Holy Spirit is important as that wise lawyer, that our Lord calls Advocate, who is here to guide us and help us in this mission. He is our Lord's ally that he leaves us. His role is to teach us everything and remind us all that our Lord said.

In fact, as the Church grows over time, it will be confronted with new situations and new problems. It is the role of the Holy Spirit to bring us back to things our Lord said so that we remain on the right path. By his presence, our Lord is assuring us that we will always find suitable answers to our questions, a reply in harmony with his teaching, if we keep listening to his word and open our hearts to the work of his Spirit. It might ask of us courage and radical change, but we are not helpless and alone.

When we leave room for the Holy Spirit, then, we can be filled with the gift of peace. There is no more valuable thing someone can wish for himself than the peace of heart. To have it is like possessing a wellspring in his field in time of drought, or enough food in storage in time of famine.

Such a peace does not mean necessarily absence of conflicts; but rather it is a spiritual gift that helps us deal in the right way with our problems and conflicts. The peace that the world gives is a peace of escape, which comes from avoidance of trouble and from refusing to face things. The peace that our Lord gives is a peace of heart that strives for new relationships between individuals, peoples and nations, beyond differences, oppositions and conflicts.

May God fill the heart of each one of us with his peace! Let us always remember that peace starts with me, because nobody can harvest what he did not plant as well as nobody can give to others what he does not have! Amen.

(Extract of my homily given on May 13, 2007, 6th Sunday of Easter)

Acts 15: 1-2, 22-29; Revelation 21: 10-14, 22-23; John 14: 23-29



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