

Weekend Readings & Reflections

May 21-22, 2022: Sixth Sunday of Easter

Reflection: *The first Church council, the Council of Jerusalem we hear about in today's First Reading, decided the shape of the Church as we know it. Some Jewish Christians had wanted Gentile converts to be circumcised and obey all the complex ritual and purity laws of the Jews. The council called this a heresy, again showing us that the Church in the divine plan is meant to be a worldwide family of God, no longer a covenant with just one nation. Today's Liturgy gives us a profound meditation on the nature and meaning of the Church. The Church is One, as we see in the First Reading: "the Apostles [bishops] and presbyters [priests], in agreement with the whole Church [laity]." The Church is Holy, taught and guided by the Spirit that Jesus promises the Apostles in the Gospel. The Church is Catholic, or universal, making known God's ways of salvation to all peoples, ruling all in equity, as we sing in today's Psalm. And the Church, as John sees in the Second Reading, is Apostolic—founded on the twelve Apostles of the Lamb. All these marks of the Church are underscored in the story of the council. Notice that everybody, including Paul, looks to "Jerusalem [and] . . . the Apostles" to decide the Church's true teaching. The Apostles, too, presume that Christian teachers need a "mandate from us." And we see the Spirit guiding the Apostles in all truth. Notice how they describe their ruling: "It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us." Knowing these truths about the Church, our hearts should never be troubled. The Liturgy's message today is that the Church is the Lord's, watched over and guarded by the Advocate, the Holy Spirit sent by the Father in the name of the Son.*

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Welcome to our discussion for the Sixth Sunday of Easter:

All: Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy his consolations. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: This week we begin to learn more about how the Holy Spirit guided the early Church and how he continues to work in the Church today. Jesus told us that he would never leave us alone but would send the Holy Spirit to be with us until the end of time. How do you picture the Holy Spirit? Let us reflect on the Holy Spirit as we watch today's video.

Play the video on FORMED.org: [Opening the Word – 6th Sunday of Easter \(Year C\)](#)



6TH SUNDAY OF EASTER

[Jesus said to his disciples:]
"The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you."
- Jn 14:26-27a

Excerpts from the Lectionary for Mass ©2011, 1996, 1970 CCC

Digging Deeper The Holy Spirit and the Gift of the Church's Teaching Authority

"The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ.' This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome. 'Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication, and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith.'" — CCC 84-85

FIRST READING ~ Acts 15:1-2, 22-29 ~

Some who had come down from Judea were instructing the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the Mosaic practice, you cannot be saved.” Because there arose no little dissension and debate by Paul and Barnabas with them, it was decided that Paul, Barnabas, and some of the others should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about this question. The apostles and elders, in agreement with the whole church, decided to choose representatives and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. The ones chosen were Judas, who was called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers. This is the letter delivered by them: “The apostles and the elders, your brothers, to the brothers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia of Gentile origin: greetings. Since we have heard that some of our number who went out without any mandate from us have upset you with their teachings and disturbed your peace of mind, we have with one accord decided to choose representatives and to send them to you along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, who have dedicated their lives to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. So we are sending Judas and Silas who will also convey this same message by word of mouth: ‘It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities, namely, to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, from blood, from meats of strangled animals, and from unlawful marriage. If you keep free of these, you will be doing what is right. Farewell.’”

Circumcision was physical and symbolic - an outward sign of an inner consecration and being a nation 'set-apart'. It was a physical part of oneself offered to God like a sacrifice. Jewish Christians wanted gentile Christians to follow their Mosaic practice (given by Moses) and be circumcised. This question caused the first Council of Jerusalem meeting.

- *How do we know what is important to keep practicing? Are external markings important? Do you show / wear a sign of belonging to God? Why? Why not?*

Jewish / Gentile conflict happened in the very early days of the Christian community. Reducing numbers of Jewish Christians were faced with increasing numbers of Gentile Christians. The loss of culture and influence caused tension.

- *How was the tension resolved? What are the lessons for us today?*

SECOND READING ~ Revelations 21:1-5a ~

The angel took me in spirit to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. It gleamed with the splendor of God. Its radiance was like that of a precious stone, like jasper, clear as crystal. It had a massive, high wall, with twelve gates where twelve angels were stationed and on which names were inscribed, the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites. There were three gates facing east, three north, three south, and three west. The wall of the city had twelve courses of stones as its foundation, on which were inscribed the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. I saw no temple in the city for its temple is the Lord God almighty and the Lamb. The city had no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gave it light, and its lamp was the Lamb.

The Book of Revelation is written during a time of great persecution. A vision is painted of the future being secure in the ultimate victory of the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. We all need a vision and story to lead and call us forward in our current pain and struggle. It is the essence of hope.

- *In your difficult times, what keeps you going? What is the story and vision of the future that gives you hope? The gates of God's City have three gates open in all directions.*
- *If you were to picture your church community, how could it be seen to have its doors 'open' and welcoming to all? What is something you would be willing to try to make your parish more 'welcoming'?*

GOSPEL ~ John 14:23-29 ~

Jesus said to his disciples: "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me. "I have told you this while I am with you. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. You heard me tell you, 'I am going away and I will come back to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe."

Jesus teaches his disciples there is a link between loving Him and keeping his Word.

- *Reflect on an experience of listening to His Word. What is the difference between listening and keeping? Have you had an experience of feeling 'at home' with the Word? What is it like?*

In John the Holy Spirit is called the Advocate (a translation of the Greek Paraclete - literally the one who stands by the side of a defendant in the courtroom). It is also translated as counsellor, comforter, encourager.

- *What image do you have for the Holy Spirit in your life?*

Peace is the 'trademark' and presence of the Holy Spirit in the tradition of Christian spirituality. 'Not as the world gives do I give it to you'.

- *What sort of 'peace' does the world seek to give? Where is peace 'found'?*



MEDITATION

Do you know the love that surpasses all, that is stronger than death itself (Song of Songs 8:6)? In Jesus' last supper discourse he speaks of the love he has for his disciples and of his Father's love. He prepares his disciples for his imminent departure to return to his Father by exhorting them to prove their love for him through their loyalty and obedience to his word. He promises them the abiding instruction and consolation of the Holy Spirit.

Saint Augustine says *the Lord loves each of us as if there were only one of us to love*. God's love for each of us is as real and tangible as the love of a mother for her child and the love of a lover who gives all for his beloved. God made us in love for love - to know him personally and to grow in the knowledge of his great love for us and to love him in return.

How can we know and be assured of the love of God? The Holy Spirit helps us to grow

in the knowledge of God and his great love. The Spirit enables us to experience the love of God and to be assured of the Lord's abiding presence with us (see Romans 8:35-39). The Holy Spirit also opens our ears to hear and understand the word of God. Do you listen attentively to God's word and believe it? Ask the Holy Spirit to inflame your heart with the love of God and his word.

Do you know the peace which surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7)? In his farewell discourse Jesus grants *peace* as his gift to his disciples. What kind of peace does he offer? The *peace of Christ* is more than the absence of trouble. It includes everything which makes for our highest good. The world's approach to peace is avoidance of trouble and a refusal to face unpleasant things. Jesus offers the peace which conquers our fears and anxieties. Nothing can take us from the peace and joy of Jesus Christ. No sorrow or grief, no danger, no suffering can make it less.

How can we attain the peace which the Lord Jesus offers his followers? Through the gift and work of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, the Lord Jesus shows us how to yield our passions of anger, fear, and pride to him so we can receive his gift of peace. The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness and strengthens us with his gifts and supernatural virtues which enable us to live as wise and holy disciples of Christ.

- *How can we best prove our love for God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit? How does Jesus give us an example in this weekend's readings?*
- *What does Jesus mean by the peace He leaves with us and gives us? How can we obtain this peace?*

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: In closing let us now pray together:

ALL: Lord Jesus, in love you created me and you drew me to yourself. May I never lose sight of you nor forget your steadfast love and faithfulness. And may I daily dwell upon your word and give you praise in the sanctuary of my heart, You who are my All. Amen.

Leader: (if time, let us offer up our intercessions ... St. Michael... Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...)



[Opening reflection was shared from St. Paul Center at <https://stpaulcenter.com/studies-tools/sunday-bible-reflections>]

[video can be found at FORMED.ORG "Opening the Word". Additional reflections can be found at FORMED in "Opening the Word"]

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