

The Sixth Sunday of Easter Cycle C, 2022

The Acts of the Apostles, from which we heard the first reading, emphasizes the guidance of the young Church by the Holy Spirit. As the number of gentiles increased rapidly, there was a difference of opinion between Saint Paul and his companions who were converting the gentiles and the former Pharisees who became Christians, who believed in strictly observing the Mosaic Law. They believed that the gentiles had to follow Jewish religious laws, which included circumcision. St. Paul and his companions did not think that this was necessary. A very heated argument began. The Holy Spirit guided these two very determined groups to gather as a council in Jerusalem, headed by Peter and other Apostles, to decide this issue.

How do we resolve our differences? Are we open to sit down with others and discuss differing opinions? Are we willing to invite others in authority to help mediate our disputes? Are we willing to invite the Holy Spirit to guide us? The normal business process in negotiations is for both sides to present their interpretation of the “facts” regarding the dispute and to determine which are the most just and equitable position (courts) or with a list of objectives that we want to achieve. In discernment we identify differences in opinion and take them to Holy Spirit for guidance. This is done by praying for while over this matter. There must be openness to an outcome, which we may have not yet been conceived. If we believe that any outcome other than what we want will be a disaster, we are not open to the guidance of the Spirit. Good negotiations, even corporate ones, also try to understand the feelings, not just the logic, of others. We must be open to change our assumptions based on the point of view of the other party and this requires attentive listening.

The decision of the council, which was attributed to the Holy Spirit, was that circumcision was not necessary for the gentiles, but they were to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, from blood, from meats of strangled animals, and unlawful marriage. (In today's terms that would be remarriage without and an annulment)

When the Book of Revelation was written, Jerusalem and the temple built by Herod had been completely destroyed. The New Jerusalem as described in the vision does not have a temple but we shall see God "face to face". The New Jerusalem as the Church is built with its Jewish heritage and the Apostolic Tradition. The twelve gates represent the twelve tribes and the twelve layers of stone in the walls represent the twelve apostles. Jesus did not come to abolish the Jewish law but to fulfill it.

Before he was crucified, Jesus told his disciples and us, that whoever loves him will keep his word (commandments). Our love of Jesus is to be measured not by what we say but by how we act. Are we obedient to all the teachings of Jesus especially caring for the poor and forgiveness of others? What teaching do we ignore because it is difficult or because we disagree with it? The Sacredness of the Eucharist, The sacredness of life in the womb? Same sex marriage? Co-habitation? Premarital sex?

If we follow his teachings, his Father, our Father in heaven, will love us, and he and his Father will come and dwell within us. A community that follows the teachings of Christ will be a community of love. The love in that community will reveal God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, to the world. How much do we love each other here at St. Bartholomew? Do we know the names of our brothers or sisters who have sat with us in the same bench or close by for years? Do we only gossip and complain but do not encourage unity and promote the community?

Jesus gave his disciples peace that they might remain calm and strong in their faith in the face of what was about to happen to him on the cross. Jesus also promised his disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit who we have received. The Holy Spirit will teach us and remind us of all that Jesus told us. Why? Jesus knows that we shall face challenges ahead and we shall need help. Do you remember the steps you have to take to access this help? Constant prayer and an open heart. Praying to God for guidance is different from telling God what He ought to do.