

Homily
May 25, 2025
6th Sunday of Easter
24:39 to 34:43

As I said at the beginning of Mass, the Spirit is noted in all three of our readings today. Two of the readings are semi-historical, the First and the Gospel. The Second, from Revelation, is Apocalyptic: not history, but a vision of a future where God is victorious.

We're going to focus on the semi-historical ones today.

The First Reading comes to us from the 15th Chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. It is very important to the life of the Church over the centuries. But also in that very moment. For you see, some of the Jewish Christians, as we heard, were insisting that the entire Mosaic customs and laws must be observed by the new Gentile Christians. And even though Paul and Barnabas debated mightily with them in Antioch, they finally realized that they were not the ones who could make the decision about this. But they needed the advice of the larger Church. And so they went to Jerusalem.

The event they participated in is known as the "Council of Jerusalem," sort of a template of what was to come throughout the centuries. Now there's a whole section of the chapter from Acts that we didn't hear today. We skip from Verse 2, all the way to Verse 22. What's in between? It's the actual debating, the discussing, the praying together, the relying upon God's Spirit to guide their decisions.

Paul speaks. Barnabas speaks. Peter, James – they share what was on their hearts, what they have come to know. And they come to the decision, which we heard.

But notice that they say very clearly in our reading, "it is the decision of the Spirit and ours as well." It is not "their" decision. It was a decision that flows from the very Spirit of God. And they cooperated.

And what was their decision? We heard it very clearly. Those Gentile Christians were to abstain from meats sacrificed to idols, (in other words, to false gods,) from blood (the source of life), from meats of strangled animals (which still contains the blood – the source of life) and from unlawful marriage (that is, marriages that were too close in relation between the husband and wife).

Simple rules. And that was enough. The rest was all in Christ. He sent the Spirit in the first place. If you keep free of these, you will be doing what is right. In the Spirit. Always. In the Spirit.

In the Gospel, we hear part of the first chapter of the great “Farewell Discourse,” which stretches for 4 chapters in John. It’s Jesus saying good-bye. But his good-bye is littered with truth because he wants them to know and to share, before he leaves.

And in the midst of it today, we hear this: “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you.” He says it before his Passion and glorious death. And it’s the first thing he says to the disciples in the Upper Room, when he appears to them after the Resurrection. You recall that, don’t you? “Peace be with you.”

Interestingly enough, what were the first words of Pope Leo XIV on the balcony, to the people of God, the world? **Peace be with you.**

Still and all today, that is the greeting every bishop gives to the people. The first thing out of his mouth when he presides at Mass, or prayer: Peace be with you.

It is a peace that is not understood by the world because it is rooted in the truth of the Gospel and the reality of Jesus Christ, the Father and the Spirit.

You know, we live in a blessed time. I can say in my lifetime I have lived in a blessed time. I was alive for the Second Vatican Council. I lived it through the seminary, learning about it. And then, Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul I, Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict, and Pope Francis and now, Leo.

All those years have been filled with the Spirit of God, breathing life into the Church, trying to get us to be who we are in the Spirit of the Second Vatican Council. And it’s not been easy. And there’s still some bumps yet to come, I’m sure. But that Council was driven by the same Spirit that drove the Apostles in our First Reading.

And even more so. Just in the last number of weeks, we have seen it firsthand, have we not? The Cardinals gathering in Rome, that they might debate, discuss, share their thoughts and ideas before the Conclave, during those 9 days of mourning. They listened to each other. They prayed together. They waited for the Spirit to speak through them. And then, that very brief Conclave.

I lost a lot of money on the length of that Conclave. (Laughter) I figured we were going to stretch for 4 or 5 days. It was only 4 votes. --- I don’t gamble. Anymore. (Laughter)

And what did we see there? We saw the Spirit of God working through the Cardinals. Having listened to each other --- what their local churches were experiencing at this time and what they saw in their regions, their continents. And having listened and discussed and debated, they quickly found in the Spirit, Leo XIV.

What a wonderful time to be alive. What a wonderful time to be a part of a Church, which is not about politics, but is about the truth in Christ Jesus and the power and the wonder of the Spirit. It should give us hope, my brothers and sisters. Because that same Spirit works here, in this community.

It works in the East Deanery. It works in the Archdiocese. The Spirit – if we allow it – guides us. Breathes life into us. Helps us see that there might be another way.

What a blessing that we can live in this time all having experienced what the Lord Jesus offered, and what the Community of Faith continued and yet, still does.

Let us continue rejoicing today and giving thanks and praise to God for how the Spirit moves among us.