

Homily
May 22, 2022
6th Sunday of Easter
26:06 – 42:52

First of all, let me apologize to whomever was going to lead Children's Liturgy of the Word this morning. I totally forgot it. I apologize especially to you children, who are going to get to sit here and listen to what I am about to say.

You know, in the seminary of the 1960's, the early 70's and the early 80's, on my part, there was no course given on HVAC maintenance. You know what HVAC is, Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning. There was no such course. And 39 years ago, when Archbishop O'Meara laid hands upon me yes, I was ontologically changed; but I was not infused with such knowledge. So, the windows are open because we had a hiccup, some time between Mass on Friday and last night, right Ross? We kind of know what happened, but we're still trying to figure out the final answer. So don't blame Ross and don't hold up expectations that I cannot live up to. God did not give me that ability, either by instruction, or the laying on of hands.

We live in the United States. Do we live in a Republic, or a Democracy? How many say Republic? Raise your hands. How many say a Democracy? How many say both? How many have no idea?

Well actually, we do live in a Republic because we have elected officials who make policy and decisions for the good of all. In a Democracy, as in the Greek city-states, the body gathered. The citizens gathered to make policy and decisions for the good of all. Now, it is true there are times when in our Republic, we have Democratic practices, such as a referendum -- when the voters say, "Put this on the ballot," and we do. And the voters decide. But for the most part, we are a Republic.

The Church, you might have realized, is not a Democracy. Anybody surprised? And it's not a Republic. But it is also not a Monarchy, although it's had its Monarchical moments in history, nor is it a Dictatorship. It is a community of believers, organized in a hierarchy of responsibility and leadership, from the Pope, all the way through to the Domestic Church, which is our homes.

We are a community of believers. That is evidenced in our readings today. In Revelation, there is an image we're given of the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven. Notice that the foundation is the Israelites; above are the twelve tiers of the Apostles. And there is no Temple there, but rather the

gathering of all believers in this heavenly Jerusalem, where the Lord is the Temple and the Son is the Lamp. This New Jerusalem is the Church, the body of believers. It is our ultimate home.

We hear in the Gospel Jesus reminding the Apostles that he is going to send the Spirit, the Advocate, upon them to strengthen them, to advocate for them and to work through them. That is an important and an essential part of who we are as Church.

But an even larger portrait is painted in the Acts of the Apostles, our First Reading. It is known as the Council of Jerusalem – Chapter 15 in the Acts of the Apostles. And we only heard a part of it. We heard the first two verses and then we skip to 15 or 20 verses later, to the conclusion of the Council of Jerusalem.

What was the issue? Why did they gather? Well, we heard, there was dissension about Gentile Christians. Do they have to take up the burden of being totally Jewish, or not? And where Paul and Barnabas were, there was continual discussion and debate and dissension over this issue. So much so, that these communities that they were talking with, ministering to, sent them to Jerusalem for a decision about this.

Now the section of Acts that we're missing takes place. If you went to Daily Mass, you would have heard it this week. The representatives arrive. They're welcomed. They state the case. The Apostles, the presbyters, the elders are gathered, along with the larger community. And they begin to debate and discuss the issue. And it takes a while – a lot of voices.

Eventually, Peter stands up in the midst and he recalls his encounter earlier in the Acts of the Apostles, with the household of Cornelius – where the Spirit of God comes upon the house and he baptizes them. They were Gentiles. Peter was surprised. But his surprise turned into, "This is my testimony."

Then Paul and Barnabas are asked to discuss what their experience among the Gentiles has been: the mighty works that God has been doing among these people.

And finally, James, who is the head, if you will, of the Church in Jerusalem stands up. Having heard all of this, he says what we heard in the letter: we're not going to place an additional burden upon you Gentile Christians. All we ask is that you refrain from certain practices, which would disrupt the well-being and happiness of the Jewish Christians. Avoid such things as strangled animals, animals

sacrificed to other gods and illegal marriage, that is, too closely related to each other. And he offers them peace and farewell. That's how he distills everything and brings it to a conclusion.

This is called the Council of Jerusalem. We could also call it a synod. In our time, those words are sort of synonymous. A synod. You have heard the word, right? The fact is, in the past few years you've been invited to participate in two synods, right? We had the Synod of the Family in 2017. And now we are embarked upon the ***Synod on Synodality***. Really? You've got to use the same word in the same phrase? Yes.

What is synod? It's a Greek word. It's made up of a preposition and a noun. It basically means, "walking on the path together." Walking on the path together. From that has derived two other words: ***synodal and synodality***.

These words are here to stay – in part because synods began in the First Century in the Church. They have over the centuries been for local churches. Like a diocese having a synod. We haven't had one here in this archdiocese since the 1930's. Perhaps in the near future – I don't know. Then there are regional synods. There are national synods. Then we have the large synods: ecumenical councils, or a synod of the bishops, when the pope calls them. We've had a number of those over the past 50 years. It has become a necessary and essential dimension of who we are as Church *on the path together*.

Now synod does not mean that we're going into anarchy. Remember, I said the Church is not a Republic and it's definitely not a Democracy, but it is definitely a community of believers. And all the believers have a role to play. Some have a role of ministry. Some have a particular role of authority. And others of us have the "priesthood of our baptism." We're all a part of the whole.

In these synods, especially since Pope Francis invited us to participate in speaking our mind about the family and now a synod or synodality, it is ours to have a voice. A voice. It's not just the experts that need to be heard. For you see, there is the *sense of the faithful* that is a part of the whole mix, if you will, of who we are as Church, especially in the 21st Century.

You may have noticed that we have a whole lot more communication devices since the Second Vatican Council. There are ways that we can communicate that we never imagined in the 1960's. The Church is taking those up and using them. How? To invite us to speak. To invite us to listen. And to come to dialog and discussion, that we might offer to the whole body of the Church our wisdom.

But notice: Just like in the Acts of the Apostles reading that we heard, and the part that I recalled for you, everyone gathered. Everyone spoke and together they came to a conclusion, they came to a decision that this would be the thing for us to do. But there was one who took the decision: James, James, for it went out from Jerusalem -- at that time, the center of Christianity.

And so today when we do synods we have the same process. Many of us are invited to speak. The wisdom is sifted from around the world. And eventually arrives.

The wisdom helps make the decision. The bishops and the pope take the decision. And then share the direction in which we deal with issues, not unlike the issue that the early Church faced with the question of what are we to expect of Gentile Christians.

We are the Church, my brothers and sisters. Yes? We all serve the Community of Believers. We are the Community of Believers. As I noted last week, we can encounter the Community of Believers in different languages, cultures, different geographies. But still and all, from the smallest domestic church, through to universal, we are together that body. And in our lifetime we are being offered the chance to speak.

So. Kind of scary, isn't it? It's like for the first time in your life Dad asked you your opinion. Remember that day? But you got better at it, didn't you?

We're invited. Let us not be afraid. It's a gift we've been given. It is an integral part of the Church today. May we enjoy the gift. May we embrace it. And may we call upon that Spirit, which guided the Council of Jerusalem – the first synod – to do that with us as well.