

Sixth Sunday of Easter C/2016

The readings of this sixth Sunday of Easter talk about the growth of the Church. They show how, through the work of evangelization done by the disciples, the Church has extended far beyond the limits of Israel's territory. They equally show how that growth has not only brought joy, but also tensions which were resolved thanks to divine wisdom and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The first reading describes the first council of the Church in Jerusalem and the task the apostles had to resolve the problems raised by the entry of the pagans in the Church. It also shows the consensus which the whole assembly of the Church came to with regard to the gentiles. Finally, it shows that the goal pursued was to help the gentiles focus more on Jesus' message of salvation than on mere regulations.

What is behind this text is the idea that the Church is a body that holds together and in which each member in particular is like a link in a necklace. Another idea is that, because the church is a structured body, the issues rising inside it cannot be resolved by one individual, but by the whole assembly and the established authority. The last idea is related to the importance of the Holy Spirit as the guide of the Church in difficult times.

This text allows us to understand the point of today's Gospel as Jesus assures his disciples of the sending of the Holy Spirit. First of all, the Gospel opens up with Jesus telling his disciples that loving him is to keep his words, as well as keeping his words is keeping the words of his Father.

Then, the Gospel talks of the Holy Spirit that Jesus will send in order to teach the disciples and to remind them of his teachings. After that, the Gospel speaks of peace that Jesus will give his disciples and which is different from that which the world gives. Finally, the Gospel talks of Jesus' invitation to his disciples that they might be happy because it is for their sake that he goes to the Father.

What do we learn from these readings? Today I want to talk about the Church as a structured body. What do I mean by that? Let me explain. I believe that each one of us remembers the life of St Paul. If I could summarize it, I would simply say in a few words that from being a fighter against Jesus, he became a soldier of Jesus.

Everything started on the road to Damascus. When Jesus appeared to him, the whole trajectory of his life changed. On a personal level, the apparition provided him with a mandate and legitimized his mission among the gentiles. In fact, the apparition made of St Paul a very important instrument of God's salvation in the Church.

However, in spite of that personal mandate and legitimization, when the problems occurred in the churches he founded in pagan lands, instead of resolving them alone, he referred to the whole assembly of the Church gathered in Jerusalem.

Why would he do that? Because the Church is not a private business or a club of friends; it is a structured body. All the members of the Church stand together as one body, in spite of their individual gifts and talents. They are just like a link on a necklace. The links might be shining and golden, but it is when they come together that the necklace is beautiful.

We have to develop more and more this idea of togetherness, to stop the tendency to isolation where, once people have participated in the mass, they think that the duty is done and there is nothing more to do. No; we have to stick together and put our individual talents

at the service of the growth of the body of the Church. We have to share together the joys and the pains of the Church, as one body.

This body grows with the presence of new members. As it was in the past, so it is today. This demand makes the work of evangelization important even today. It is all about evangelization ad extra, that is towards others, and evangelization ad intra, that is, on ourselves. That is why stopping evangelizing is like stopping growing.

Each member of the body grows spiritually by feeding himself of the body and the word of Jesus. That is the reason why Jesus says that whoever loves him will keep his word and his Father will love him. Consequently, both the Father and he will dwell in him.

This body is also guided in its journey and the meander of its history by the Holy Spirit. It is for that reason that at the council of Jerusalem, when the apostles reached a consensus with regard to the problems of the churches in the gentile lands, they said, "it is a decision of the Holy Spirit and of us".

By saying so, they were confirming the words of Jesus who said: 'The Holy Spirit will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you...' That is why we should not be afraid for our future and that of the Church. In fact, as the Church grows over time and all over the world, we will be confronted with new situations, new contexts and new issues. However, we have the assurance that it will be fine, because we will not be alone, but rather assisted by the help of the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, in spite of new situations and new problems we will be facing over time, the Holy Spirit will teach us how to remain faithful to Jesus. That is why Jesus invites us to keep our calm and to be at peace, because the presence of his Spirit means peace for us.

Even if the problems we would be dealing with would be insurmountable, the Holy Spirit will plead for our cause. That is why Jesus calls him "Advocate". In modern terms, that would mean that the Holy Spirit is our Lawyer. The role of a Lawyer, as it were, is to defend and to find attenuating circumstances that can make the case of the accused light. In that sense, the Holy Spirit intercedes continually for us before the Father.

Let us pray that Jesus may fill us with his Holy Spirit so that we live in peace with one another in following Jesus faithfully. Let us ask Jesus to help us love him by loving his Father so that both may dwell in us. May God bless you all!

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



Homily Date: May 01, 2016

© 2016 – Fr Felicien I. Mbala, PhD, STD

Contact: www.mbala.org

Document Name: 20160501homily.pdf