

Sixth Sunday of Easter A/2020

After the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples who fled the persecution, found refuge in the other cities of the Roman Empire of that time. More they were fleeing, more they were teaching about Jesus. That is how from the teaching of Phillip many people from Samaria believed in Jesus and entered the Church.

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard the news of the conversion of the gentiles, they rejoiced and thanked God. They sent Peter and John in order to comfort them and pray over them for the reception of the Holy Spirit. By visiting these newly baptized, Peter and John show that the mother Church in Jerusalem keeps the bond of unity with the new Churches born from the work of the dispersed disciples.

This episode teaches us two things. First, that new communities can be formed wherever someone proclaims the word of Jesus. But, these communities cannot grow independently from the mother Church. They have to stay in communion with the universal Church. Second, the Church is one body of Christ. It is made up of people of different nations and cultures. However, in spite of those differences, they are all one people in Jesus Christ.

What unites us in spite of our difference is our faith in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. That is why as Peter and John were sent from Jerusalem to the gentiles, the first thing they did was to pray for the newly baptized so that they, too, receive the Holy Spirit like them. For that reason, they laid their hands on them. This gesture of laying hand remains even today when the sacrament of confirmation is celebrated.

To receive the Holy Spirit, and to be confirmed as disciple of Jesus, does not mean necessarily being free from trouble and suffering. To be a disciple, indeed, is to follow in the footsteps of Jesus by accepting suffering for the sake of God's kingdom. That is what Peter highlights with in the Second reading.

The acceptance of suffering is very challenging, because suffering tends to make us bitter at the idea that because we belong to Jesus we should be preserved from illness and disease. That is why when some people get sick they abandon their faith. The truth, however, is that, as human beings, we cannot escape suffering.

When we are sick and remain faithful, we glorify Jesus in our body. In fact, whatever might be our sufferings we have always to sanctify Christ in our hearts and imitate him. That is why it is better to suffer for doing good, if that be the will of God, than for doing evil.

In this difficult time of Coronavirus, the suffering we see in the world and around us, through our friends and relatives, can make us doubtful of God's love and providential plan for us. But, this difficult time can be also a moment of witness, in which we can make the words of St Paul ours, when he says: "What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? (...) Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord" (8: 35, 39).

Because it is about giving witness, we should be also capable of giving an explanation to anyone who asks us questions about our hope and faith in Jesus. In order to fulfill such a demand, each one of us is compelled to know more about his faith in order to defend it against its detractors.

We should never forget that nobody gives to others what he does not have. That is why we have to train ourselves in order to know more about our church and our faith. Remember that the one who is rich gives of his richness; the one that remains poor gives of his poverty. And yet, Jesus gives to all of us an equal opportunity to know him and become his witness. Everything depends on us and on what we do with the word of Jesus. To be informed about our faith is a great witness we can bear to our discipleship today.

In that perspective, we can say that today ignorance is not acceptable. Gratuitous statements without sufficient knowledge and affirmations without knowing what we are talking about are dangerous. This is the time of accountability for our faith. We have the right to know and to be informed.

Not that we want to display to others our knowledge or to be arrogant, but it is a duty we have to fulfill for the viability of our faith. Neither shall we be prideful of our knowledge, but rather we have to do everything with humility and modesty for the glory of God.

We want to know about our faith because we love of Jesus. Jesus is the first to love us and wants that we love him in turn. But, how can we love him without keeping his commandments. It is like the spouses, if one is doing always what upset the other, their relationship cannot stand. In end they will separate from one another.

We too, if we want to show Jesus that we love him, we have to keep his commandment. If we do so, Jesus will live in us as he lives in his Father and the Father, in turn, will love us. Moreover, as there exists an intimate relationship between Jesus and his Father, it follows that by loving Jesus, his Father will love us. Consequently, Jesus will reveal himself to us and live in us as he lives in his Father.

Of course, Jesus' love is not easy, as we know by experience. But, Jesus reassures us that he will not leave us orphans. He will send us another helper, that is, the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit "Advocate", that is, someone called in order to help in time of need and trouble. In modern terms, it means that the Holy Spirit is our lawyer who has to defend us and to tell the truth that can lead to our liberation. In that sense, the Holy Spirit takes away our inadequacies and enables us to cope with life in the footsteps of Jesus.

Although the Holy Spirit is important, many neglect his role in our life; they do not listen to his incentives. They shut down his voice when he gives us direction to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. The world does almost the same. The world here represents all these people who live as though God does not exist. As they do not accept God, they do not accept anything related to him, including the Holy Spirit.

Let us ask the Lord to help us listen to the Holy Spirit he has left us. Let us pray that God may lead us to full obedience of Jesus by keeping his commandments. May God bless you all!

Acts 8: 5-8, 14-17; 1 Peter 3: 15-18; John 14: 15-21



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