

May 26th, 2019, 6th Sunday of Easter, Year C

Acts 15:1-2, 22-29

In the early days, members of the Christian Church in Palestine kept the Jewish law in its entirety. (Children were circumcised, rules of ritual purification were observed, the Sabbath (sundown Friday to sundown Saturday) was kept as a day of rest, and Jewish-Christians went to the temple for morning and afternoon prayers.) But there was a problem. Before a Gentile became a Christian and a member of the Christian Church, was it necessary that he should be circumcised and take upon himself the Law of Moses? There was also another problem in that strict Jews could have no social interaction with Gentiles. They could not have them as guests nor yet be their guests. They would not, as far as possible, even do business with them. This is the setting for today's reading.⁵

1Some These were disciples of James who were basically converted Jews and who had a Pharisaic background.⁶ **who had come down from Judea were instructing the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the Mosaic practice, you cannot be saved."** For centuries, circumcision was the rite of initiation into the covenant family of Abraham and the Mosaic religion of Israel. It was a badge of Jewish identity that entitled one to share in the blessings of the Old Covenant. The absolute necessity of circumcision in Jewish tradition implied that any male who was uncircumcised was destined for destruction.³

2Because there arose no little dissension and debate by Paul and Barnabas Luke gives this motivation for the sending of Barnabas and Paul to Jerusalem.⁴ **with them, it was decided that Paul, Barnabas and some of the others should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about this question.** The local Church in Antioch looked to the apostolic Church in Jerusalem for doctrinal guidance.³

22The apostles and elders, in agreement with the whole church, In 49 A.D. there took place what is known as the Council of Jerusalem. Peter convened this meeting of the available apostles, possibly even all of those living, to consider the persistent problem of how much if any of the Mosaic Law to impose upon Gentile converts to Christianity. All of the Apostles except James the Just had been sent out in the dispersion of 42 A.D. All had worked among largely Gentile populations and had made at least some Gentile converts. All, therefore, except James, who was in charge of the church in Jerusalem and whose converts were mostly all Jewish, could see from their own experience the correctness, both theological and practical, of not attempting to bring the Gentile converts under the Jewish Law which required circumcision, nor segregating them from the rest of the Church and its Jewish Christian leaders.² This decisive break with the national religion of Israel makes the Jerusalem Council the theological center of Acts. It shows that the Church is both a covenant community distinct from Judaism and also a catholic community that embraces all nations.³ After listening to the discussion, Peter as head of the Church, spoke last and proclaimed the basic decision that established the universality of the Church. It is also interesting to note that tradition indicates that about the year 49 A.D. the Blessed Virgin Mary "fell asleep" in Jerusalem and was assumed body and soul into Heaven and that all the apostles were recalled from their far-flung missions to be present for her last hours on earth in her mortal body. While the date is not historically provable, it is both reasonable and likely and as Warren Carroll puts it: "To picture Mary, the Mother of God, tenderly taking leave of her first and dearest spiritual children, the Apostles, on the eve of the Apostolic Council, is an entrancing vision."² **decided to choose representatives and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. The ones chosen were Judas, who was called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers.** Acts 15:32 mentions Judas and Silas as prophets of the JERUSALEM community to which they belonged and explains that a major function of prophets

in the early Christian churches was to encourage and strengthen the community.¹ Later, when Paul and Barnabas quarreled and split up because of John Mark, Silas was chosen by Paul for the Second Journey. He is also referred to as Silvanus.⁷ Acts 13:1 named Barnabas and Paul among the prophets of the church in ANTIOCH.

23 This is the letter delivered by them: The letter recommends Paul and Barnabas, Judas and Silas. They in turn guaranteed that the letter was authentic and explained its meaning. This was necessary because letters were hand delivered. There was no postal system Christians could use.¹ **“The apostles and the elders, your brothers, to the brothers in Antioch,** Antioch was one of the largest cities of the Hellenistic-Roman world. It was here that the name Christian was first applied to the followers of Jesus. It is evident from other allusions to Antioch that the Christian community of the city during the first generation of the Church was large and important, second only to Jerusalem.⁷ **Syria and Cilicia of Gentile origin: Greetings.**

24 Since we have heard that some of our number who went out without any mandate from us This refers to the disciples of James from Jerusalem that were referred to in verse 1. They had gone out without authorization from their home church.⁴ **have upset you with their teachings and disturbed your peace of mind,**

25 we have with one accord decided to choose representatives and to send them to you along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

26 who have dedicated their lives to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

27 So we are sending Judas and Silas who will also convey this same message by word of mouth:

28 ‘It is the decision of the Holy Spirit The deliberations and decisions of the Council were guided by the hand of God. This is precisely what Jesus promised to do for the ordained leadership of the Church through the Spirit.³ **and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities,**

29 namely, to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, When a heathen sacrificed in a temple, the priests received part of it and that part was then sold for ordinary purposes. Such meat had been offered to an idol and the idols were really demons and devils.⁵ **from blood,** To the Jew, the life was in the blood. All Jewish meat was killed and treated in such a way that the blood was drained off, for the blood was the life and the life belonged to God.⁵ **from meats of strangled animals,** The blood was not drained off. **and from unlawful marriage** This referred to incest.⁸ These four things were forbidden in Leviticus for the aliens residing in Israel. If these simple regulations had not been observed, there could have been no social interaction between Jew and Gentile.⁵ **If you keep free of these, you will be doing what is right. Farewell.”** In this way the Christian Church officially broke out of its Jewish matrix. This is the last act that Luke records of Peter or of the apostolic college; the implication is that the Twelve now disperse to the ends of the earth.⁴

Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23

The introduction to this vision of the bride, the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, deliberately recalls the introduction to the vision of the whore of Babylon in chapter 17. The two cities are anti-types of one another.¹⁵ Much of the imagery comes from Ezekiel. Remember that John “unveils” (which is the meaning of the word “apocalypse”) and thus reveals and that this takes place on several levels. We can look at what has taken place, what will take place and WHAT IS TAKING PLACE AT THIS TIME IN THE LITURGY OF THE MASS which is the MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB.¹¹

10 The angel took me in spirit Probably in a trance.⁹ **to a great, high mountain** The mountain is the site not of the viewer but of the city itself, as seen by Ezekiel. The mountain is really Zion, the mount on which Jerusalem is built.¹⁴ **and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.** This new Jerusalem is bride and wife of the Lamb. Love, covenant bonding, sacrifice—all are evoked by this most powerful image of the church in its final, most perfect stage,¹⁴

the Church triumphant. This is what lies ahead for those whose names are written in the book of life.

11It gleamed with the splendor of God. God's presence, filling the Church, transfigures her. The glory of the Church is being compared with its source, the glory of God.⁴ **Its radiance was like that of a precious stone, like jasper, clear as crystal.** At all times, in whatever the circumstances, the city of God comes from heaven—it is not built by humans.¹⁴ The apostle attempts to convey heaven's unearthly beauty through the use of earthly media. The concrete expressions used are incidental to the net effect.¹⁰

12It had a massive, high wall, with twelve gates where twelve angels Because the city comes from heaven, it must have celestial guards.⁴ **were stationed and on which names were inscribed, the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites.** Here, John is alluding to the perfect continuity between God's people in the OT and the Church in the NT, for the city included saints from the Old and the New Testament.⁴

13There were three gates facing east, three north, three south, and three west. The arrangement of the gates, in threes facing the four points of the compass, indicates that the Church is universal: all nations must come to it to gain salvation.¹³ These would be the people mentioned in Luke 13:29 who will come "from the east and the west, and from the north and the south, and will take their place at the feast in the kingdom of God."

14The wall of the city had twelve courses of stones as its foundation, on which were inscribed the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The preaching of the apostles is to the construction of the Church as the foundation to an edifice. The New Jerusalem is made of Jews and Gentiles and is founded upon the twelve apostles.¹⁴

22I saw no temple in the city for its temple is the Lord God almighty and the Lamb. The Temple was the focal point of the historical Jerusalem, for there God dwelt among his people, but God's presence in the new world is not bounded by temple walls for the glory of God and the Lamb completely permeates the city.⁴

23The city had no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gave it light, In the OT when Yahweh revealed Himself, a splendid brightness showed forth the divine glory. And so, the presence of God will fill the heavenly Jerusalem with such a brightness of light that there is no need of sun or moon.¹³ Here is a great truth: Only when we see things in the light of God, do we see things as they are. It is only when we see things in the light of God that we see what things are really important and what things are not.¹⁵ **and its lamp was the Lamb.** This is an incredible theological image for the Son as mediator of the splendor of the Father.¹⁴ The Lamb is Jesus. He is Lord, God, Savior, Messiah, King, Priest, Prophet...and Lamb. The first seven are titles with which we could comfortably address a God-Man for they have dignity, implied wisdom, power and social status. But it is the title "Lamb" that dominates the book of Revelation as it appears 28 times.¹¹ According to the CCC, the Lamb is Christ crucified and risen, the one High Priest of the true sanctuary, the same one "Who offers and is offered, Who gives and is given."¹² In the ancient writing called the "Didache" which was the collected teachings of the apostles, the word "sacrifice" is used four times to describe the Eucharist. When we see this writing of John as the disclosure of the divine liturgy which we celebrate in the Mass, with the emphasis on the Real Presence of Jesus' Body and Blood under the appearance of bread and wine and the sacrificial nature of the liturgy, it makes sense. John Paul II has called the Mass "heaven on earth," explaining that "the liturgy we celebrate on earth is a mysterious participation in the heavenly liturgy." Scott Hahn proposes that the key to understanding the Mass is the Book of Revelation---and that the Mass is the only way a Christian can truly make sense of the Book of revelation.¹¹

Once again we return to the words Jesus spoke at the Last Supper: It was commonly held by the Jews that when the Messiah came he would be revealed to the whole world as King and Savior. The Apostles take Jesus' words as a revelation for themselves alone, and they are puzzled. Hence the question from Judas Thaddaeus: "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" This is the reply that Jesus gives.¹⁷

23 Jesus said to his disciples: "Whoever loves me will keep my word, Fellowship with God, the revelation of God are dependent on love; and love is dependent on obedience. The more we obey God, the more we understand God; and the man who walks in God's way inevitably walks with God.²⁰ This word is made known to us in the Scriptures. The CCC says that "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ."¹² (CCC 133) **and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.** If someone loves Jesus Christ the Revealer of God, if he keeps His Word, that is, believes and observes His precepts, that man becomes the personal dwelling-place of God. God comes to him; He is no longer for him a creative almighty power but gives rise to a personal exchange of love.²¹ Through grace the living presence of the Trinity inhabits the hearts of the faithful. God dwells in the saints on earth before the saints dwell in God in heaven.¹⁶

24 **Whoever does not love me does not keep my words;** The lack of love and obedience is what keeps the world from having any part in this manifestation of the Father and the Son. **yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me.**

25 **I have told you this while I am with you.**

26 **The Advocate,** This title meant a lawyer or, more literally, "someone who stands at the side of another" to defend and encourage. Sometimes it is translated as "Comforter" or "Consoler." This is because we attribute to the Holy Spirit, in a special way, the role of filling us with spiritual joy and consolation.²² **the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name,** This reading is part of the farewell discourse of Jesus, and so prepares us for the celebration of his Ascension. The risen Christ will return to the Father from whom he was sent, and in his stead the Holy Spirit will then become God's way of dwelling among us. Filled with that Spirit, the apostles will be able to continue to carry on Christ's work with confidence and peace, knowing that they are accompanied and guided by the divine presence.⁸ **will teach you everything** Note that in verse 23 Jesus is speaking to his disciples. The terms "you" and "your" in this verse are plural. It is thus a promise to guide and instruct the ordained leaders of the Church, here represented by the eleven apostles. It is not a promise that the Spirit will grant every individual Christian supernatural insight into the full meaning of the Gospel or the Scriptures.¹⁶ The 33,850 Christian denominations¹⁹ demonstrate the anarchy caused by each believer presuming to be individually led by the Holy Spirit apart from the apostolic leadership established by Jesus in His Church.¹⁸ **and remind you of all that I told you.** Following the glorification of Christ, it is the function of the Spirit to complete the revelation of Christ by enlightening the Church concerning the true and full meaning of what Jesus has done and said. The Holy Spirit brings no new teaching, rather, he "reminds" the apostles and enables them to keep in mind the teachings and deeds of Jesus.¹⁷ The Gospels are not just a "video" of Christ's life, but rather, they are the life of Christ as INTERPRETED and EXPLAINED by the Holy Spirit as He instructed and brought to the memory of the apostles all that Jesus had taught them according to this promise. John's Gospel itself is part of the fulfillment of this promise.¹⁸

27 **Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.** While this was the common Jewish formula for greeting and farewell, on the lips of our Lord it acquires its deepest meaning and is one of the great messianic gifts. It includes reconciliation with God and reconciliation of men with one another. It is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. "It is serenity of mind, tranquility of soul, simplicity of heart, a bond of love and a union of charity." (Augustine) It is spiritual tranquility that Christ gives which

has no resemblance to what the world gives. It is not a gift of peaceful circumstances but rather, peace in all circumstances.¹⁷ **Not as the world gives do I give it to you.** Worldly peace is often procured by violence and is always unstable.¹⁶ **Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.**
28 You heard me tell you, 'I am going away and I will come back to you.' If you loved me, The meaning here is that if they understood enough to love Jesus for who he really is, which they could not possibly do until after the Resurrection, then they would rejoice that he is returning to the Father. **you would rejoice that I am going to the Father; for the Father is greater than I.** St. Augustine exhorts us to “acknowledge the twofold nature of Christ—the divine, by which he is equal to the Father; the human, by which he is less than the Father. But the one and the other are together not two, but one Christ.”¹⁷
29 And now I have told you this before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe. This final instruction is given by Jesus less than 24 hours before he died.¹⁸

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: The Acts Of The Apostles” by William S. Kurz, S.J., (2) “The Founding of Christendom” by Warren H. Carroll, (3) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles,” (4) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (5) “The Acts Of The Apostles” by William Barclay, (6) “The Navarre Bible: Acts Of The Apostles,” (7) “Dictionary of the Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (8) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers:2004” by Aelred R. Rosser, (9) “Revelation” by Wilfrid J. Harrington, O.P., (10) “The Book of the Apocalypse” by William G. Heidt, O.S.B., (11) “The Lamb’s Supper: The Mass As Heaven On Earth,” by Scott Hahn, (12) “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (13) “The Navarre Bible: Revelation”, (14) “The Apocalypse and the Third Millennium” by George T. Montague, S.M., (15) “The Revelation Of John” by William Barclay, (16) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of John,” (17) “The Navarre Bible: St. John,” (18) “Catholic Bible Study: John” by Stephen K. Ray, (19) “World Christian Encyclopedia”, (20) “The Gospel Of John” by William Barclay, (21) “Saint Joseph Commentary On The Sunday Readings” by Achille Degeest, O.F.M. and (22) “The Comforter: The Spirit of Joy” by Andrew Apostoli, CFR.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.

May 31st 2019 is the time to start your novena to the Holy Spirit. A novena is a prayer with a specific intention offered nine days in a row, originating in the nine days of prayer by the disciples and Mary between the Ascension and Pentecost. Usually, we pray for an infilling of the Holy Spirit and if you have special needs, this is a good time to pray about them, as well. God Bless You.