

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

### **First reading:**

*The Council at Jerusalem  
(Acts 15.1-2, 22-29)*

This was the crucial meeting of the whole Church at Jerusalem where the decision was made that Christianity was not only for Jews but was open to the gentiles too. Paul's activity in receiving gentiles into the Church had created a crisis: was not God's promise to Abraham limited only to Jews? Was it not limited only to those who observed the prescriptions of the Law? Could the Spirit of the Risen Christ really dwell in and activate the uncircumcised?

The staggering breakthrough achieved here totally altered the course of history. The discussion at the meeting is omitted from this reading, which jumps to the concluding instructions, but it is a model for a community discussion: in the awareness of the presence of the Spirit, they heard the facts of the case, listened to the opinions on both sides of the question put forward by experienced leaders, and then made their decision in the Spirit. The letter of instructions that follows is also a model of its kind, firm in its decisions, but firm also in its appreciation of individual consciences. The restrictions imposed on gentile Christians were designed to make fellowship with Jewish Christians possible without outraging their sensibilities.

### **Question:**

*How do I get to know God's will for me?  
Would it be helpful if I took more part in parish life?*

### **Second reading:**

*The Holy City of Jerusalem  
(Revelation 21.10-14, 22-23)*

The description of the New Jerusalem, the bride of Christ, begun in last week's reading, continues to be highly symbolic. The 12 gates (drawn from Ezekiel's prophecy) face the four quarters of the compass, to show that it embraces the whole universe and is four-square solid. They symbolize the 12 tribes of Israel and so also the 12 apostles. The richness and contentment is hinted by the sparkle of precious stones, not only diamonds but many others too. The dimensions of the city are vast: a cube, of 1500 miles in each direction. No need for the light and warmth of the sun, for the Lord God and the Lamb provide a single source of its nourishment and illumination. No need for a sacred area, for the presence of the Lord God and the Lamb make the whole city a sacred area.

This is the ultimate goal of creation, when all is absorbed into God, the ultimate fulfilment of 'Thy Kingdom come'. The Letter to the Ephesians expresses it as the whole universe 'headed up' into Christ, making sense of creation and bringing creation to its completion.

### **Question:**

*If I really lived in the presence of God, what would be the most daunting thing, what the most encouraging thing?*

In these final discourses of Jesus at the Last Supper, as he sketches the outlines of his future Church, come four passages promising the coming of a Paraclete or Advocate, the Holy Spirit.

'Paraclete' and 'Advocate' mean the same: someone called to your side as a supporter, often in a legal situation. The Father will send this Paraclete, in the name and power of Jesus, so that the Paraclete will make Christ present in the Church, not physically but in a new way. The Paraclete will strengthen Jesus' disciples with Christ's own strength. The Paraclete will lead the disciples into all truth, so that they gradually come to a fuller understanding of all the implications of the teaching of Jesus. Like any legal advocate, the Paraclete will provide the followers of Jesus with power in teaching and argument to withstand opposition.

This is the power that will guide the Church in ages to come, not only the official teachers of the Church, the successors of the apostles, but all the faithful who preserve and enrich the tradition of the Church by their prophetic office. The decree of Vatican II on the Church leaves no doubt that not only the call to sanctity but the prophetic office also extends to all the members of the Church, an inspiring and awesome responsibility.

Question:

*For what special task do I most need the Paraclete's guidance? For what do I most need the Paraclete's strength?*

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