

## SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Year C: Acts 15:1-2, 22-29; Ps 67; Rev 21:10-14, 22-23; Jn 14:23-29

May 22, 2022

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We are nearing the end of the Easter season in the Church. Today is the Sixth Sunday of Easter. This coming Thursday is Ascension Thursday, and then two weeks from today the Easter season ends with the Feast of Pentecost. So, as we near the end of the Easter season, the Church reminds us in the Gospel for Mass how Christ began to speak to His disciples of the need for Him to leave them and of the future coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, *“The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.”*

These words of Christ are the reason we believe that the Gospels and all the Scriptures are sacred writings. We believe they are sacred, because they were not produced or written in an ordinary way – not just by the intelligence of their human authors. We know the Scriptures *were* written by mere men, but these men had divine assistance when they wrote their texts. When the Evangelists sat down to write the Gospels, they were reminded of what Christ had said and taught by the help of the Holy Spirit. The older we get, the more we all could use a little memory enhancement. And that’s what the Holy Spirit provided to the writers of the Gospels, as Jesus promised. He told them, *“the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will ... remind you of all that I told you.”* The Holy Spirit assisted the human authors. We call this assistance divine inspiration, and it’s why we say the Scriptures are sacred, inspired texts. It’s also why we call the Scriptures the Word of God – because we believe the Holy Spirit is the primary author of the Scriptures, and the human authors were mere instruments in the hands of God.

As we near the end of the Easter season, our attention is turned to the role and work of the Holy Spirit in God’s plan for the world. The Holy Spirit guided the early Church right from the beginning, and not just in the writing of the Sacred Scriptures. In the first reading, we heard the Apostles and the elders of the Church held a council in Jerusalem, to discuss and decide whether converts had to become Jewish first before becoming Christian. This was one of the main doctrinal questions the early Church faced, and it caused great controversy and division. The decision of the Council was announced in a letter, and it expressed the confidence of the Apostles that they were being guided by the Holy Spirit. The Apostles wrote, *“It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities ....”* The Apostles were convinced that God

the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus had promised would come and guide them to all truth (cf. Jn 6:13), had guided them to make the right decision – that it was not necessary to become Jewish before becoming Christian. And this decision had major consequences for the spreading of the Gospel and the growth of the Church in the non-Jewish world.

This is a good example of how the Church makes decisions on important questions, even if they are controversial. The Church always asks what *God* says the answer is, based on the revelation made by Christ, and not on what people or the culture thinks or demands the answer *should* be. As one theologian explains, the Church does not change her teachings on important matters of doctrine, “not because she claims too much authority but too little: she does not claim the right to dissent from her [Lord and] Master. For, her master is not [the] culture, which keeps changing, but Christ; ... [who] ‘*is the same yesterday, today, and forever*’ (Heb 13:8)” (Peter Kreeft, *Food for the Soul: Cycle C*, 309).

This is also why we put such great trust in the Word of God and allow it to govern our lives and determine our positions, even on controversial topics. Because the Holy Spirit reminded the Apostles of everything Jesus taught them, we know that the Gospels are divinely inspired – they are not merely human texts, but rather the Word of God, which teaches us many truths. We believe these truths based on the authority of God who does not and cannot lie. And no matter how controversial these truths are at any given time in history, we believe these truths because they are from God. We know God is always more trustworthy and reliable than any of us.

We also believe God the Holy Spirit guides the Church throughout history and would never lead the Church to any position that would contradict anything Christ taught. God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are consubstantial with the God the Father, as we pray in the Creed every Sunday at Mass. The Divine Persons of the Trinity could never contradict each other by leading the Church to contrary conclusions.

So, as we near the end of the Easter season in the Church and turn our attention to the role that the Holy Spirit played in salvation history and still plays by guiding the Church, we should be reassured that the doctrinal teachings of the Church are reinforced by divine assistance. And this should give us peace, because Jesus said, “*The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.*”