

5th Sunday Easter Year B

May 3, 2015

Readings: Acts 9: 26-31; 1 John 3: 18-24; John 15:1-8

“The church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria was at peace.” This single sentence may indeed be but a snapshot in time, but at least in the moment in which it was written, we are assured that all was well in the Church. Sometimes though, words can belie what may be percolating beneath the surface.

When I took a course on the history of the Ecumenical Councils, I could not help but be struck by a decree that concluded the Bishops deliberations at the Fifth Lateran Council in March 1517 in Rome:

“There was peace for the whole Church and a resulting union. The moral habits of churchmen as well as of secular and other persons were reformed...it was reported on several occasions that no topics remained for debate and discussion, and that over several months nothing new at all had been brought before them by anyone...In order that prelates and others at the present council....may not be further wearied by their labors and expenses and so that they may be able to visit and bring encouragement to their churches...we bring the present council to a close.”¹

Just about seven months later, an Augustinian monk named Martin Luther would post his ninety-nine theses on the door of the castle Church in Wittenburg, setting into full motion the Protestant Reformation. Talk about a misread! Looking back, there certainly appears to have been an extraordinary lack of awareness of the impending storm, as judged by the closing decree of the ecumenical council at the Lateran. The moral here- saying that everything is all right does not make it so!

¹ Council of Lateran V, Session 12, 16 March 1517

Peace is elusive, whether in our families, within a parish or a city or among nations. The present day situation in Baltimore only highlights the inherent difficulties in finding and fostering peace. It can leave us all feeling quite helpless.

But let us take the Acts of the Apostles at face value. There was peace in the Church, even if fragile. If we wait until the coast is completely clear, we may never cross the street. If a young adult waits for the perfect future husband or wife, they may be waiting a long time. If we wait to find the perfect parish before joining it or the perfect Pastor- I've got news for you- you may be looking for a long time. And when we do find it, we may be surprised to learn that, once we sign on the dotted line, it is no longer perfect! None of us is perfect, but hopefully, we are willing to be perfected.

Jesus tells us today- "Remain in me, as I remain in you." He does this most especially through the Holy Eucharist, celebrated today for the first time by some children in our parish. [First Communicants, he wants to remain in you, and he does so through grace, God's very love in your soul. The sacraments give us this grace and today you'll experience it for the first time. Congratulations]

Peace and concord has to begin somewhere. As parish is as strong as are its committed members. A priest is as strong as his willingness to be used as a weak and imperfect instrument for the sanctification of God's people. The prayers of the people for their priests are crucial. Are we praying for each other? Do we see that the Holy Eucharist can heal our divisions? Do we realize the power it holds for us?

These are all fruitful questions for our own prayer and reflection. May God know that He can always count on us to further peace all around us, first in our families, our parish, our cities and ultimately our world.