

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday Easter Year “C”

May 25-26, 2019

Readings: Acts 15: 1-2, 22-29; Revelation 21:10-14,22-23; John 14:23-29

We are privy to a glimpse into one of the early controversies in the church in today’s first reading. The disagreement centered upon how one ought to observe the covenant of Moses. Were Gentiles who desired Baptism bound to observe the prescriptions of the Mosaic covenant, seen by many as an undue burden? The answer discerned after much prayer and discussion was a resounding “no” with respect to certain ritual prescriptions – no undue burdens were to be placed on them.

Unfortunately, too many of us fall prey to interests about other people’s problems – we cannot seem to help ourselves. Controversy sells. Why does controversy sell? Does it make us feel better to know that others are miserable or have problems? That others fight and argue? What a revelation!

Disagreements ought not to surprise us, intrigue us, and most certainly ought not to entertain us. In the first reading today, St. Luke’s account of a disagreement demonstrates that the early Church went through its own growing pains. Still, the Holy Spirit guided the members of the church, then as now; the gates of the nether world will never prevail.

Disagreements may be handled in constructive ways or in unhealthy ways. Could not the same be said for today, even if the issues we face as Catholics in modern society are quite different?

The Church is the bride of Christ, she is the sacrament of salvation in our midst. The Church does not wish to unduly burden anyone. Living the virtues, observing the Commandments, practicing the beatitudes – certainly this is a challenge for any of us.

But could we ever claim that these are an undue burden? An undue burden is that which is unnecessary, impractical, and beyond the scope of what was intended. Certainly, there are accounts of various penitential practices in ages long past, which strike us today as unusual, even unhealthy. But these were never placed upon the general public. The Lenten fast of fifty years ago was quite likely too strict; Pope Paul VI relaxed some of them.

Compare your experience in a grocery store today to even ten years ago— what we see is a remarkable difference. Busy individuals and families rarely have time to cook as they did a generation ago. Everything is catered to convenience. I hate to admit it, but microwave bacon taste pretty excellent! Convenience is not all bad!

But I do wonder whether a lack of sacrifice in daily tasks, has taken its toll? Have we become soft? Have we turned away from any sense of sacrifice, seeing little or no value in it? If life has become so much more convenient, does that make it any easier to live? Have these conveniences made us any happier and more at peace at our core?

Jesus teaches us in the gospel that his farewell gift to us his peace. Plain and simple—it is about peace. Our first leaders in the faith knew about hardship firsthand, and yes, they disagreed about how best to proceed in spreading the Gospel. They worked through the disagreements, listening to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In his best known work, entitled appropriately, *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*, Saint Cyprian used the image of the sun's rays, remarking that though many, yet the light is one; similarly, the tree's branches are many, yet the strength deriving from its sturdy root is one. Finally, the streams of water flow from one ultimate Spring, and their oneness abides by reason of their starting point.

Cut off from the sun's rays, where is the light? Break off a branch from the tree, it can bud no more; block a stream from its source, it dries up. We need our source, and we must see that the Holy Spirit is the chosen instrument for guiding the Church and our lives in the present day.

Yes, Cyprian also had a sharp disagreement with the Pope over the issue of the validity of Baptism offered by one who was guilty of heresy. Though he came down on the wrong side of that dispute, nevertheless, he was absolutely correct in his belief regarding the necessity of the Unity of the Church. In his famous line:

*You cannot have God for your Father if you have not the Church for your mother.*<sup>1</sup>

Each of us is in a position to foster unity by means of our charity, patience and understanding. We bear with one another's faults and we become instruments of peace. Jesus gave 'peace' as his farewell gift, an expression of the harmony and communion with God that itself was a seal of the covenant.

It is incumbent upon us to utilize this precious gift of peace, lest we squander it in our families, our parish, our Church. The Holy Spirit, our Advocate and Helper, dwells within the Church, always guiding us on the way to peace and unity. Let us be ever worthy and always grateful for this precious gift.

May we live a life of peace; handle our disputes with patience and charity; live in hope of the Lord; seek God, without fear of an undue burden of faith and all will be well.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Cyprian, *De unit.* 6: PL 4, 519