

05/05/13 6 Easter C

- Because we are here in this Church, I'd guess that all of us want to end up in the same place when our life on earth is over...in heaven. Our second reading gives us a glimpse of the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, and it's a wonderful vision. The trick is how we get there.
- Jesus' followers wanted the same thing. Soon after he died and rose, they banded together. They wanted to keep his message alive. They began by preaching to their fellow Jews, but soon Gentiles (not of Jewish origin) wanted to accept the message of Jesus.
- How were they to be treated? Jesus had given no instructions on this question. Would they need to keep the Mosaic Law, which all of the apostles kept? Would the men need to be circumcised?
- These may sound like trivial questions to us, but to them, they were anything but trivial. Our first reading says something brief about the discussion of this issue and its eventual resolution. But it leaves out a lot of verses which give more details of the discussion.
- It was a lively one and, I strongly suspect, not always calm. If you've met Orthodox Jews you'd have an idea why it was so. For them, the law is God's assurance of his presence. It's much more than a number of rules they have to keep. And so it was for many early Jewish Christians.
- Eventually, though, the leaders came to a resolution. Some believe it actually took two different meetings to reach the decision. Gentiles would not have to keep the Jewish law. But they would observe a few practices out of respect for their Jewish Christian brothers and sisters.
- Notice, though, that the decision comes from the Holy Spirit—a power those leaders respect. It is not mere human deliberation. Much as the cardinals who recently met to elect the Pope believed the Holy Spirit was with them, so these people did as well.
- We believe the Holy Spirit is God's continuing presence with his people, the Church. Our gospel describes the Spirit as an Advocate. That was a legal term for one who spoke in favor of a person in court.

-- In a similar manner, the Holy Spirit walks with us through life, speaking on our behalf. It doesn't shield us from life's troubles. It doesn't eliminate conflict. But the Spirit gives us courage to handle these conflicts in a loving manner.

-- Those leaders in the early Church, less than two decades from Jesus' resurrection, engaged in fierce debate. It could have torn apart many groups. But the presence of the Holy Spirit prevented that.

-- One wise priest recently said, God's love does not protect us from bumping our noses, stubbing our toes, breaking of hearts, or losing our way. It encourages us to stay on the bus until we get to the end of the line where our home is right across the street.

-- As a universal Church, as a parish, as families, we have had our share of conflicts, disagreements and even fights. But if we keep our focus on the Spirit of God, that Spirit will guide us to the end of the line.

-- We all seek our heavenly homeland. We may see different ways of getting there, but the Spirit keeps us focused on the goal. It also keeps us from running over each other along the way.

-- If we trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to speak with us and for us, we will reach the end of the line. And there we will find the heavenly Jerusalem...and God himself... waiting to welcome us.