

6th Sunday of Easter

May 5, 2013

In his farewell words at the last Passover supper Jesus promised his disciples that he and the Father would come to dwell in those who loved him and were true to his word. He also promised that the Father would send them the Holy Spirit to remind them of all he said and did, to guide them in all truth. These are the promises of the one who claimed to be the Truth itself, the one who said no one knows the Father but the Son and anyone to whom the Son reveals him. Contrarily he also said that no one came to him unless the Father had drawn him. Because those who accept Jesus as the one sent to be their savior are a gift to him from the Father, Jesus could rightly say, The Father is greater than I.

We see the promise of the guidance of the Holy Spirit come true in the reading from the Acts of the Apostles. As Paul and his Jewish companions began to proclaim the gospel to the gentiles, significant numbers began to accept this new way to salvation. This caused a dispute about how much of the Mosaic Law they had to observe in order to be numbered among those who are saved. This led to the gathering of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for a council to resolve the issue. Today's reading omitted the addresses of Peter, James, Paul and Barnabas in the debate. It simply concluded with their decision not to lay any burden on the gentiles beyond what was strictly necessary.

In conveying their decision they boldly said, It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and ours to tell you these things. Many times since then the bishops and elders of the church have had to come together to resolve new issues about dogmatic truths and orthodox practices. Their decrees may not have said, "the Holy Spirit and we have decided such and such", but surely they invoked the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth. Those councils are named for the place where they were held: some familiar ones being the Councils of Nicea, Constantinople, Ephesus, Chalcedon, Lateran, Trent, and in our own times Vatican II.

We believe that the Holy Spirit was at work in guiding the deliberations and decisions of those councils that confirmed the creedal truths of our faith: about the full humanity and divinity of Jesus, Son of God; about Mary's entitlement to be called Theotokos, the God-bearer, about the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Many antichrists have arisen and will continue to come forward with false interpretations of revelations, the meaning or absurdity of human suffering, and that there is no longer a need for God to explain the material world. "The fool says in his heart 'There is no God.'" Might is right! Only the fittest, most adaptable to environmental changes, should be the survivors.

As the course of human history continues and things evolve, the church will have to deal with revivals of old errors newly dressed and with new ones. Two thousand and some years of history since the incarnation make it clear that the weeds and wheat will continue to grow together until God shakes out the wrinkles of creation, turns it to dust and blows it away. Then that new Jerusalem will come down from heaven where the glory of Jesus, the true Lamb of God, will cast forth its healing rays. Nothing will be left in the dark. All will be made right. All will be well, very well.

Until that happens the church must continue the fight to retain her freedom to proclaim the gospel to all nations. "Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!" We continue the liturgical cycle of remembrance of all God's providential care for our poor fallen humanity generation after generation, century after century. The Easter season will soon end. Next Sunday we will celebrate Jesus' ascension into heaven,

taking with him our human nature to be glorified with the glory he had as Son of God before the world began.

In two weeks we will celebrate that promised gift of the Holy Spirit first bestowed on the disciples and Mary in the upper room at Pentecost. In our baptism and confirmation we too received that flame of enlightenment and driving wind of apostolic zeal from the Holy Spirit. By uniting ourselves with the most acceptable sacrifice of Jesus at this Eucharist, may we open ourselves to what the Spirit is saying to us individually in our life decisions and to the church universal in response to the challenges of our so-called post modern world with its culture of death, its secularism and materialism, its playing with life and genetics, its relativism and other aberrations from the truth.

How shall we be among the fittest to be the survivors? "Who then is the conqueror of the world? The one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." We can accept the testimony of the water, the blood, and the Spirit, for they are of one accord. Jesus Christ is Lord. He has won the victory for us. Let us claim it in boldness of spirit and firmness of faith. Alleluia.