

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER [C]

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

Have you ever walked unknowingly into an intense debate? No sooner do you arrive somewhere and suddenly you realize you have walked right into a heated conversation.

Well, today the First Reading brings us right smack into the heart of a great big controversy. And this great big controversy threatened to shipwreck the Church Herself.

ON ONE HAND, Jesus was a Jew who made the trek to the Temple every year. Jesus was circumcised as Jewish law prescribed on the 8th day after His birth. Jesus prayed and taught in the synagogue as was Jewish custom.

ON THE OTHER HAND, Jesus boldly taught *new* teachings and lived His life in a style that challenged long-standing traditions.

Saint Paul understood the *newness* as clearly as anyone. This is exactly what St. Paul is getting at when he writes that we are not longer saved by practicing the Law, but we are saved (how?) by our faith in Jesus Christ. Most definitely, there is something *new* and that something *new* is glorious since it is of God's making.

Yet, the mixing of old and new makes for one great big controversy. The raging issue to settle is the question whether followers of Jesus are required to follow Jewish practices and beliefs or not.

How, then, was the problem resolved?

Today's Scripture reading tells us that the leaders (elders) of the Church decided to meet in Jerusalem to work it all out. The meeting came to be called the Council of Jerusalem. It is the first of the Councils in the history of the Church. All told there have been 20 Councils – the most recent Council being Vatican II (1962-1965).

And what was the result of the first Council, the Council of Jerusalem? The family of Israel is directed by God to welcome Gentiles. That is, Jesus' life, death and resurrection create a new mission, a universal mission. Something *new* of God's own design is underway!

Church Councils invariably happen because of great big controversies which break out and threaten the very life of the Church.

These intense debates and heated conversations give cause for the Holy Spirit to act.

Listen to what today's Scripture teaches us about the outcome of the Council of Jerusalem: "It is a decision of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 15:22).

In today's Gospel Jesus promises us that He will send One whom He calls the Advocate - the Holy Spirit - Who will guide us into the Truth; The Advocate, the Holy Spirit will remind us of all Jesus has taught.

The Spirit is sent to live *in the Church*, reminding us all of what Jesus said and did.

The Councils of the Church – beginning with the first century *Council of Jerusalem* (Acts 15) continuing through the most recent twentieth century Council called *The Second Vatican Council* – are all manifestations of the Holy Spirit; the Advocate, the Helper Who is guiding and directing the Church of Christ.

Friends, the purpose of the Church is not to perpetuate great big controversies, not to fuel them. The purpose of the Church is to let the Holy Spirit come and change our hearts so that we can be about the business of leading the world to Christ.