

The 6th Sunday of Easter

In the 1st Reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we have seen that many Gentiles had accepted Christianity as a result of the preaching of Paul and Barnabas. However a question quickly arose: How much of the Law and traditions of Moses should be required of these Gentile converts? It was such an important question then, and today it is an equally important question! What is required to be an effective Christian in the modern world?

As a Catholic Christian, if a non-church-goer were to ask you today: What does it take to be a really good Christian in today's world? What would your answer be? List some of those things:

- A Godly Person.....a person who has and knows a relationship with God
- A person who attempts to live that reality on a day-to-day basis. What does that look like?
- Think big think in terms of our great Lenten Study Respectable SinsConfronting the Sins we Tolerate. Does an engaged Christian live comfortably with Sin??? What is it that they do? What is it that they are?
- Go to Mass every Sunday, and when the plate is passed do not be shy about contributing!!!!!! I am not saying it is unimportant But surely there is more to it!

The issue in the Early Church was so significant that the first Church Council was called to deal with it The Council of Jerusalem. You had one group, The Judaizers, who were very strict and orthodox, and believed you could only be a good believer if you followed all of the prescriptions of the law and all of the traditions. The other group, and among them were Peter and Paul, said: "It is not right for us to lay unnecessary burdens on our brothers and sisters who want to be believers and know a relationship with God because it is coming clear to us that though we are the 'Chosen Ones' from the outset, God has plans for ALL of His people to have a relationship with Him. It was a really hot-button issue, and there were very strong views. Not unlike the issue 'Do we build a wall or not build a wall?' What is the core issue? Is it about sharing or is it about controlling?

The decision of the Council and its declaration was delivered by letter to the communities: "It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us not to place

on you any burden beyond these necessities, namely, to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, from blood, from meat of strangled animals, and from unlawful marriage. If you keep free of these, you will be doing what is right. Farewell.”

This became an introduction to many decrees of the Church that would follow in the ensuing years. “It is the decision of the Holy Spirit, and of us The Magisterium teaching body of the Church.” While the decision was somewhat a compromise — a very important detail worthy of note — instead of this new religious experience becoming a Jewish sect, as many others had become, Christianity becomes a Universal Religion. However in order to flourish, it has got to navigate its way through many more obstacles. Because in its core, Christianity is not a religion that is based on doctrine, how much one knows, how much one comprehends, how much one studies, how much one teaches, or how much one performs or practices rituals. It is a religion that is based on knowing A Person, Jesus Christ. And having a relationship with Him.

The Gospel for today sheds enormous light on that. The scene is during the Last Supper. Jesus is sharing intimately with His disciples, giving them some of His final instructions before He leaves them. “Peace I leave with you: my peace I give you. Not as the world gives do I give to you.” A peace which the world cannot give to you, this is my gift to you. Wowany of you know that kind of peace?

What would you be willing to do for such a gift of “Peace” ? “Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.” These have got to be some of the loveliest words of the Gospel truly powerful! Yet, there is an inordinate absence of that same “Peace” in our world. Why do you think that is the case?

As we look carefully at the scene, we might think it was a strange time to be talking about ‘Peace’ because everything was in turmoil around Him. How then was He able to talk about peace? Seems like a strange time and a strange place!! To us, it may seem that way To Jesus, it was the perfect time. Because peace is Communion with God thats what the Peace of Jesus means Communion with God no matter what is happening around me. And Jesus was in perfect Communion with God despite all the turmoil, and His awareness of all that was about to unfold.

So, He was able to talk about Peace even as His enemies were closing in on Him, and death was around the corner. One of the extraordinary Graces in my life as a priest, and it has happened a number of times, has been to be in the presence of a person who is dying and is completely at Peace. It is an extraordinary gift to receive. The great paradox of that situation is that there is often great turmoil in the situation for the family and rightly so because nobody wants to let go of such a peaceable integrated person. If the 'ole codger' were a crusty son-of-a-gun, it is not so difficult to let go! We all know that.

But, letting go of really good people is very difficult. It is as if a very part of our own selves is going with them. Tranquility is not the same as Peace. Tranquility is external. Peace is a true interior job. That is why the externals are not going to disrupt True Peace! Peace is a state of inner calm, and it designates right relationship with God and with others. An essential component of Peace is a desire to be in right relationships. Hence the adage "there is no peace for the wicked."

Peace results from trust and right relationship with God, not from things we do, or fail to do. The Peace He offered the Apostles, and which He also offers us is not an escape from reality but rather, an invitation to 'not let your heart be troubled' no matter what your current reality and to know that I am completely and totally beside you. All the knowledge in the world will not help me believe that only a personal relationship and a trust that He is here right now!!!!

— Fr. Gerry Hurley