

Christ Our Hope Catholic Church

Faith in Laity Corner



Monday, May 27, 2019

Reading: Acts 15:1-2, 22-29

6th Week of Easter

Structuring Faith

It can be said that no strong organization can function without structure. Well, the newly establishing church founded by Jesus Christ before His ascending into heaven, had to apply this rule. The stories from the Book of Acts of the Apostles examined some of the struggles, questions and actions taken as the Church began to take shape. Jesus left an Apostle to take the helm and that was Peter, conversion of followers was occurring faster than anticipated and the demands were made for clarification of what the perimeters should be for those who were newcomers.

“Some who had come down from Judea were instructing the brothers.” (Acts 15:1)

One noted that it became important to give guidance and directions to who were to enter the faith and how to work with newcomers who were not Jewish; as Jesus opened salvation for all, not just a few. It was clear that new followers were to come face to face with the traditions of the Jews; or should they? A clash of ideals and beliefs were causing confusion with those who clamored to enter this new faith, founded by Jesus Christ.

“Because there arose no little dissension and

debate by Paul and Barnabas with them....” (Acts 15:2)

Jesus was no longer there to place the rules and structures, but Jesus left the Comforter, the Holy Spirit for the

guidance of the early Church, and His followers relied heavily on the Spirit's Wisdom.

What was this question of great debate? Should the new converts be required to undergo circumcision, which was handed down from Mosaic Law? This was the seal of the early Covenant established between God with the Father of Faith, Abraham.

*“Unless you are circumcised according to the Mosaic practice,
you cannot be saved.” (Acts 15:1)*

What should be demanded of the newly converted who were never under Jewish Law? Would this rule apply to them? The early Church faced struggles in structuring our faith, like any earthly group; but the Church was left with the Seat of Wisdom for guidance, the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit worked to face all questions, as they came along. The Catholic Church over the centuries has learned that a meeting of the minds of faith has to come together during various eras throughout history.

*“Paul, Barnabas, and some of the others should go up to Jerusalem
to the apostles and presbyters about this question.” (Acts 15:2)*

We can recall within our lifetime hearing about Vatican II, which was called by St. Pope John XXIII. Yes, even today we have the Synod of Bishops, when his Holiness calls all shepherds (*bishops*) from around the world to Rome, the headquarters of the Catholic faith, to discuss issues and structures for our ever-changing times.

The early faith was based in Jerusalem and there is where Paul and Barnabas came to debate and to bring forth the realization of the countless numbers of non-Jews who were converting.

*“When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church,
as well as by the apostles and the presbyters.” (Acts 15:4)*

Imagine the Holy Spirit continued to work among the people, as the disciples passed through non-Jewish, Gentile

territories more people believed and made their commitment to follow the teaching of Jesus Christ. There was no choice for the early Church in Jerusalem, but to rejoice on what was happening all around, the fervor and the Spirit was alive and MOVING!!!

Opposition came from those in the Jewish faith who wanted to preserve the essence of Jewish beliefs and to remain faithful to the Mosaic laws of their forefathers. St. Peter, the first Pope, rose and guided by the Holy Spirit began to address this issue, *(Conservative vs. Liberal, we can say!!)*

“After much debate had taken place, Peter got up and said to them.” (Acts 15:7)

The Holy Spirit guided, Peter and he was able to bring clarity to the structuring of our Catholic faith.

“God made His choice among you that through my mouth the

Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe.” (Acts 15:7)

The proof was in the conversion of Gentiles, they were also granted the gifts of the Holy Spirit, just as all the Jewish disciples; despite the fact that they were not followers of the laws of Moses. When God freely gives His Spirit to whomever He may choose, who are we to question???

“God, who knows the heart, bore witness by

granting them the Holy Spirit just as he did us.” (Acts 15:8)

Now let us examine the laws and rules today, which will either promote life and salvation or will hinder those who seek God. Do the rules built around us support life in all facets or are they selective in what is chosen? Question: If we support life, should we not support funding for early education programs, support systems - health and dental care for young mothers with small children; controlled and limited access to dangerous weapons; protect our environment- our water supply and food quality; provide wages which make it possible for the working poor to survive; access to some type of health care? Our word which supports pro-life must support efforts to sustain life

after it is born, or we are being selectively hypocritical. Structuring our faith must be based on the truth, love and respect with access for Gentiles and Jews, American and immigrants or we may not be structured in good faith.

Let us pray that we are mindful that our structured faith must be inclusive to all as; Jesus did not show partiality to those people of various races, faith and social status; may we lead by His example.

Faith in Laity Corner is a weekly sharing of Holy Week readings written by Brenda Chee Wah,

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