

SIXTH SUNDAY EASTER YEAR C
May 12-13, 2007

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Wherever there are people inevitably there are going to be differences which can turn into disagreements and disputes. Human nature is such that we all see things differently. In an ideal world it would be magnificent if we agreed on everything. The fact of the matter is we do not, and throughout our days we all struggle with conflict.

How do you deal with conflict? Some of us become noticeably quiet and shut down. In fact, the silence is obvious and when asked, "What's bothering you?" We succumb to denial and say "Nothing," meanwhile—inside we are broken. Others of us become vociferous in the midst of conflict and freely express our opinion. Sometimes we tell everyone except the person with whom we are in disagreement. Still, there are some of us who downplay the conflict by grinning and bearing it until it escalates to the point that it sets us off and we explode.

As a community of faith, the Early Church, even in the glow of Easter light, was not immune to conflict and differences. Today's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, puts the spotlight on one of the first significant differences to arise in the ancient church. The issue centers on the Mosaic Law and Circumcision. Some Judaen members of the church want to impose circumcision on the gentile converts. In fact they state "Unless you are circumcised according to Mosaic practice you cannot be saved." This belief leads to the famous council of Jerusalem, which was really a meeting of apostolic leadership to consider the issue.

The leaders, including Paul and Barnabas do some with this conflict. They discuss it and they turn to the Holy Spirit for inspiration and guidance. Essentially, their faith enabled them to see the hand of God at work even in the face of resistance. And, in the end, Judas and Silos are sent back with this message, "It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burde3n beyond theses necessities, namely, to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, from blood, from meats of strangled animals, and from unlawful marriage."

In the midst of disagreement—the Holy Spirit prevails. Jesus, in the gospel today, speaks about the role of the Holy Spirit to his disciples. He says. "The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you."

Not just in moments of conflict and disagreement, but also in times of uncertainty, indecision, and lack of clarity, the Holy Spirit provides direction. During my annual retreat just a little over a week ago, I would take a series of walks each day and inevitably I would walk through the woods to a huge field where I would pray. In the openness of that field filled with seeds and under sunny blue skies God and I spoke heart to heart. And interestingly enough every time I was in that field there was a steady breeze. And as this wind brushed against my face I could not help but feel the presence of the Holy Spirit which was opening my heart to God's grace. ON the one hand I felt some fear because the Spirit often effects change and challenge all for the glory and honor of God. On the other hand I felt an incredible sense of relief because I know that the Spirit is in charge, leading and guiding the way. And when we live our lives in deference to the Holy Spirit there lies a wonderful peace. And admittedly I rejoice in that peace which not only allows for a better, deeper sleep, but also offers a greater strength to embrace each day.

It is no fluke that immediately after speaking about the Holy Spirit in the Gospel today, Jesus talked about peace. When we surrender to the Holy Spirit in prayer and in the way we live our lives, peace prevails.

As we live out our lives—facing decisions, disagreements and disputes, may we, like the early church trust in and defer to the Holy Spirit. "It was the decision of the Holy Spirit" . . . You know when we place our differences in the context of the Holy Spirit we not only find answers but we draw even closer to the unity Jesus prayed for—a unity that is not always a matter of uniformity. As we work towards that unity, let us continue to pray with the whole church, "Come, Holy Spirit, fill our hearts with love and our minds with light."