

## Homily – 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter C

Today is Mother's day. We thank God for the gift of motherhood, both biological motherhood and spiritual motherhood. We ask God for his special blessing on our earthly mothers living or dead through Christ our Lord. Amen. One important fact that cannot be dismissed is that mothers are generally very protective of their children. The Church is described as "Holy Mother Church". God entrusted to the Church the responsibility to guide His sons and daughters aright with the word of God and to follow the path established by God for the salvation of souls.

Our liturgical readings today speak about this relationship with God and His Church. Our Second Reading (Rev 21:10-14, 22-23) describes how God will be our dwelling, our light and our all in heavenly blessedness, "the holy city Jerusalem". The city is all holy, all beauty and all goodness; it gleams "with the splendor of God. Its radiance was like that of a precious stone, like jasper, clear as crystal." The names of God's people, "the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites", are there. The special place accorded the apostles is underlined in that on the foundation stones "were inscribed the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." Above all, that God's glory shines on all for all eternity.

Beloved, the above focus on future glory anticipates next Sunday's celebration of the Solemnity of the Ascension. In our Gospel passage (Jn. 14:23-29), Jesus looks ahead to his final departure from this world, to ascend into heaven. He is returning to the Father to receive the zenith of glory, which he had with the Father before this world was made (cf. John 17:5). He will share this glory with us if we do his will until the end. It is everlasting peace, goodness, beauty, holiness and happiness in God. Jesus grants the apostles a piece of the "pie" of heavenly peace: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you.... If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father."

Why did Jesus grant his apostles peace? Obviously, he already foresaw the many crises and controversies against his properly constituted authority. He foresaw the scandals of division that will take place. So he grants peace to his Church, peace to continue on the right path in spite of tensions and frustrations that will take place. The point is that Jesus revealed the word of God to us in word and deed. He commissioned his apostles and their legitimate successors to continue his proclamation authentically (cf. Matt. 16:16-19; Luke 10:16). He promised them the Holy Spirit as a guarantee that they will not err in teaching God's will for our salvation. As he puts it, "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." This is the indispensable basis of the Church's teaching on the infallibility of the Pope and the Ecumenical Council in defining matters of faith and morals.

Our First Reading (Acts 15:1-2, 22-29) presents us with the First Ecumenical Council of "Holy Mother Church". There had been a destabilization of the peace. Some overzealous

members had gone on a mission trip and proclaimed a false doctrine, "Unless you are circumcised according to the Mosaic practice, you cannot be saved." Paul and Barnabas [bishops] tried to correct them, but to no avail. What are they going to do? Will they decide that doctrine does not matter as long as we all believe in Christ? Not at all! Truth matters. Hence, Jesus declares, "The truth will make you free" (John 8:32). The heavenly Jerusalem is about the splendor of God, the "splendor of the truth", not about distortions.

What then happened? "It was decided that Paul, Barnabas, and some of the others should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about this question." Notice that none was in doubt about where to seek the truth. In the end, the apostles in Jerusalem determined that those members were wrong. They also sent a letter to the communities that were affected by the erroneous teachings. From the content of the letter, we see that the apostles understood their position and authority. They wrote, "We have heard that some of our number ... went out without any mandate from us." The apostles were not in doubt that they alone are in charge of the Church (cf. Matt. 28:16-20; Mk. 16:14-16). The high point of the letter was the following statement showing how the apostles understood the extent of their power and authority: "It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us...."

There are many instances of challenge against authority established by God in the Bible. Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite [Ethiopian] woman and they protested, saying "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also? (Num 12:2). Korah, Dathan and Abiram mobilized a revolt against Moses and Aaron, God's properly appointed ministers, saying, "You have gone too far! For all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them; why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?" (Num 16:3). That God upheld his chosen authority and dealt with the protest groups (cf. Num. 12:4-13; 16:19-35) needs to be an eye opener. "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice" (1Sam. 15:22).

Finally, Jesus instituted the teaching authority of his Church to provide against "relativism" – a situation where everyone does whatever one thinks is right, irrespective of God revelation. For instance, "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Jgd. 17:6; 21:25). Against such scenario, the Scripture declares unequivocally, "There is a way which seems right to a man [or woman], but its end is the way to death (Prov. 14:12; 16:25). Thus, the Early Christians simply did the smart thing: "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42). On the whole, St. Peter, our First Pope, teaches definitively as follows, "First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation" (2Pet. 1:20). We are therefore enjoined to follow the teachings of Holy Mother, the Church, and gain eternal glory through Christ our Lord, Amen. Mary, Mother of the Church, pray for us!