

Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year C, Catechist

Submitted by lectionaryadmin on Wed, 04/10/2013 - 20:00

Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for the session, read all the readings.

Acts 15:1-2, 22-29

Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8

Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23

John 14:23-29

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Was there a particular reading that appealed to you? Was there a word or image that engaged you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need for the session.

The Word In Liturgy

Several times during the Easter season we have heard of the controversy created by God's gift to Gentiles of faith in the Lord Jesus. What was initially an entirely Jewish body of disciples only gradually was persuaded—by signs and wonders and painstaking discernment—to fully accept gentiles into the messianic community of the church. Today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles presents the final decision reached by the church's leadership in Jerusalem and received by the Gentile community at Antioch.

The shortened form of the story that appears here ought to be understood in context of the longer passage from which it is taken. The full account shows a collegial process which involved the whole Church in deliberation, and required listening to the stories of God's deeds among the gentile converts. Luke makes clear that the decision to accept the gentiles was not handed down from "on high" or derived from abstract principles. Rather, a divine-human collaboration involving many people and the Holy Spirit led to the decision. The process was not complete until the local church sent back emissaries to Jerusalem "in peace," showing that the teaching had been accepted. Thus, Luke's account is important because it sets forth a model of decision-making in the early church.

The gospel reading from John continues the farewell discourse of Jesus. Ideally situated in the liturgical year to anticipate the coming feasts of Ascension and Pentecost, the reading tells both of Jesus' immanent departure and his promise of the Paraclete. Central to the passage are the words of Jesus concerning the peace that he gives to his disciples. Peace is his farewell and his gift to them—a peace that the world cannot give. More than a simple word of greeting, this peace will be a token of Jesus' abiding presence even as he leaves them, just as the Spirit, or Paraclete, will provide for the disciples those things which Jesus did for them in his lifetime (taught, led, etc.). Thus, a full picture emerges of a community of disciples who will be cared for and not abandoned

even when Jesus departs from them. They are promised a divine indwelling, the gift of peace, and the Paraclete to guide them.

Catholic Doctrine

Peace

Blessed Pope John XXIII wrote his encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, in 1963, and it was published two months before his death. One theme in this encyclical is that to achieve peace in a world bristling with weapons of mass destruction will require a concerted effort by all nations. This papal encyclical was the first to be addressed to even those outside the church, to men and women of good will.

Pope John's message, and the Catholic understanding of peace, begin with Jesus farewell gift to his disciples. Jesus speaks the word "peace" in the context of a biblical understanding of "shalom." The Hebrew 'shalom,' found in the Old Testament, means much more than the absence of war or maintaining a balance of power. "Shalom" means the well being of daily life, a total harmony with nature, God and self. It issues forth from justice and is experienced in a fruitful land and people, who have plentiful food, and dwell in security, free from fear. "Shalom" is the sum of all the benefits of God's presence with his people. Jesus gives this gift of peace in the widest sense possible. Peace is the fruit of the covenant between God and believers. Those who follow the light of Jesus as disciples walk the paths of peace and know from his teaching that "blessed are the peacemakers." (Matthew 5:9)

The 1983 Pastoral Letter of the U.S. bishops on peace (*The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*) outlines a program for pursuing peace in our time. It includes the reduction of nuclear weapons and conventional arms, education within parish communities about peace, and personal commitment to prayer for peace.

In the words of *The Challenge of Peace*, "peacemaking is not an optional commitment. It is a requirement of our faith. We are called to be peacemakers, not by some movement of the moment, but by our Lord Jesus. The content and context of our peacemaking is set not by some political agenda or ideological program, but by the teaching of his Church." (Summary, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*; NCCB, May 3, 1983; p 9).

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