

THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER - C

On this Sunday we are given another extract from Jesus' words to his disciples at the Supper table as recorded in John's gospel. While Jesus repeats his words about his imminent departure he also adds the fact that the Holy Spirit will come to them and remind the disciples of all that Jesus said to them. This will be a very important aid as they begin their preaching in Jesus' footsteps. In the first reading we hear how the Church begins to manage its relationship with the ancient Jewish faith. In the second reading we have an expansion of the vision spoken of in last week's reading, we have a description of the heavenly Jerusalem.

The **First Reading** is from Acts of the Apostles. This New Testament book is part two of a history of the rise of Christianity, the first part being the gospel according to Luke. They became separated when, about 150 A.D., Christians wanted the four gospel accounts bound together in one volume. The author, Luke, is a Syrian from Antioch, a doctor of non-Jewish origin, who was a close friend of Paul accompanying him on his second and third missionary journeys. Luke collected a great deal of evidence from a variety of sources which he edited. The book deals with the primitive Jerusalem community under Peter's leadership, the spread of Christianity to Samaria, to the gentile peoples and the early days of Christianity in Antioch. From chapter 13 Luke deals with Paul's three missionary journeys and ends with Paul a prisoner in Rome.

The reading, 15.1-2,22-29, recounts the decision taken by the Church as a result of the discussions that Paul and Barnabas had with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. Peter set out the basic principles while James, who looked after the church in Jerusalem, dealt with the practical application of these principles. A letter was written, carried by Barnabas and Paul and confirmed by word of mouth (Barsabbas and Silas), to the church in Antioch. The Church taught that pagan converts did not need to be circumcised but just keep to the prescriptions set out in the letter, that is, they should refrain from eating meat prepared for heathen sacrifice, from blood, for Jews the life principle, from strangled animals and irregular marriages as set out in Leviticus 18. What we witness here is the beginnings of the separation of the Church from the religion Judaism. As the number of pagan converts increased so the Church grew further and further away from Judaism.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 66.2-3,5-6, is a harvest-time song. The refrain speaks of all peoples of the world; by the example of the chosen people and the lessons of their history all nations are summoned to serve and praise the one true God.

The **Book of the Apocalypse** (Greek) or **Revelation** (English) is a revelation of hidden things, particularly of hidden events in the future. The authors of apocalyptic writings may be considered the successors of the prophets; they heard the Word of God and passed it on by word of mouth, whereas apocalyptic writers were given revelation in a dream and passed it on in writing. The language of this writing is richly symbolic and the importance of the visions which are described is never in their immediate literal meaning. The imagery must be appreciated at its true value and we must do our best to translate the symbols back into the ideas which the author intended them to convey. This type of writing became very popular in the two centuries before Christ, the visions of Ezekiel and Zechariah paving the way, and was fully developed by 165 BC when the prophet Daniel was written. The authorship was attributed to John, the apostle, by writers in the West, while those in the East did not hold this view. The book is dated about 95 AD with parts written at the end of the sixties AD. The book is first and foremost a tract for the times, a period of disturbance and bitter persecution, to increase the hope and determination of the infant Church. This hope is based on the belief in the great 'Day of Yahweh' spoken of by the prophet Amos 5.18. The 'Day' is coming soon when God will liberate his people from their oppressors. When John wrote the Church had been decimated by persecution, Rome and its empire (The Beast) was only a tool wielded by Satan. The book portrays the basic realities on which faith relies in any period of history; God's promise to be with his people. It is this presence that has now been perfected by the marriage of God and his new chosen people in the person of his Son, Immanuel (God-with-us). The promise of the risen Christ, 'I am with you always; yes, to the end of time,' is what gives life to the Church.

This reading, 21.10-14,22-23, continues the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem which we read about last Sunday. This time John is on 'the top of an enormous high mountain' he sees the holy city glittering like precious stones with twelve city gates named after the twelve tribes of Israel and the gates faced the four aspects of the compass allowing all nations enter the city. The twelve foundation stones of the city walls were named after the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The reading omits the measurements of the city and further description of the city's beauty, a reflection of God's beauty. The reading ends with the observation that there is no temple in the city 'since the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb' are the temple providing its light. The new spiritual worship takes place in the body of Christ sacrificed and raised to new life.