

The Sixth Sunday of Eater
May 1, 2016

During that period of early church history when believers waited for Jesus to fulfill his promise to return stretched into years, and then decades, they knew they had to deal with the fact that the apostolic eye-witnesses to Jesus were already or would all soon be dead; the Church was growing beyond Judah and Samaria unto the "ends of the earth"; heresies and false teachers threatened the unity of the community and the integrity of the deposit of the faith; needs arose for adapting to ever changing times and circumstances on an almost daily basis.

So these early Christians learned to lean heavily on the presence of the Holy Spirit to help them to decide how best to organize the Church and guide her mission so as to remain true to Jesus Christ while bringing more and more people of every race, ethnic background, culture and persuasion to the faith.

In our first reading today from the Acts of the Apostles, St. Luke describes one of the first great struggles regarding how early believers had to come to grips with the disagreements between Jewish and gentile Christians over the necessity or not of maintaining Jewish feasts, purification rituals and dietary laws.

St. Luke candidly admitted, "...there arose no little dissension and debate." In fact, if those issues were left unresolved, they would have either severely stifled the growth of the budding church or altered her direction

forever. St. Paul also addressed these sources of serious conflict in his letters to the Romans and Corinthians.

But the extent to which the early church struggled with these problems is put into proper perspective with the simple statement: "It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities..."

These "necessities" consisted of practices so repugnant to Jews that there could be no other solution except for gentile believers to refrain from them.

That set the pattern for the early church's efforts at problem solving. They would work *together*, in *faith* under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus assured his disciples that they would never be left to their own devices because the Father would send to them an Advocate in Jesus' name.

Part of the lengthy discourse, which St. John set within the context of the Last Supper, the promise of the Holy Spirit, represented one of the significant ways in which Jesus provided for his followers when he departed the earth to take his seat at the right hand of the Father.

All that Jesus had done during his three-year mission, the Holy Spirit would also do. The Holy Spirit would become tutor, teacher and guide.

The Advocate would not allow them to forget Jesus' teachings. Keeping them ever abreast of his wisdom, they would be kept aware of those values and principles which were to guide and inspire their careful following of their Lord.

As we continue to live within the same interim of Jesus' return and as we revisit our spiritual roots and ancestors yet again this Easter season, what lesson is the Advocate holding out for us to appropriate? Perhaps, it is simply the renewed realization that the Spirit sent by the Father in Jesus' name has not been recalled but continues to live and breathe and move among us.

The Holy Spirit has been given to teach us about the Father's love and to reveal the power of Jesus' resurrection in our lives. As we open ourselves to his teaching, our relationship with God will deepen and we will be conformed to his likeness to which we were created.

We will learn to turn to God more quickly during times of temptation. We will become wiser and more compassionate in our dealings with other people.

We will trust that the power of the Spirit is greater than any other power that might stand against us. In short, the power of the Holy Spirit is present to ensure that we will become more like Jesus.