

Homily of Sixth Sunday of Easter Year C

Over the period of about 1,900 years, the Catholic Church had had 21 Councils. The first three are: Council of Jerusalem (50 AD); First Council of Nicaea, Turkey (325 AD); and First Council of Constantinople, Turkey (381 AD). The last three are: Council of Trent, Italy (between 1545 and 1563); First Vatican Council, Italy (between 1869 and 1870); and Second Vatican Council, Italy (between 1962 and 1965).

The first reading tells us why the first Council (Council of Jerusalem) was convoked and the outcome of the Council. The Christian communities of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia were made up of Jewish and Gentile converts. The communities were in peace until some overzealous preachers from Judea came over and contradicted Paul and Barnabas by instructing “Unless you are circumcised according to the Mosaic practice, you cannot be saved.” The dissension caused by this made the apostles and elders to meet in Jerusalem. After the meeting, the Council sent the following mandate to the Christian communities, “It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities, namely, to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, from blood, from meat of strangled animals, and from unlawful marriages.” The Council was not interested in mosaic circumcision of the foreskin, but spiritual circumcision of the heart and mind. The spiritual circumcision addressed by the Council can be summarized in the following words: refrain from idolatry and from sexual immorality. These were major problems plaguing the Christian communities at that time.

This message is very relevant to us today, because as St. Paul writes in Romans 1:25, many people nowadays “exchange the truth about God for a lie, and worship and serve created things rather than the Creator.” Idolatry is the worship of something or someone other than God as if it were God. A question that can help us in self-examination is, “How much attention do we pay to ourselves and material things, and how much attention do we pay to our spiritual life and God? If we pay more attention to ourselves and material things than to God, we are, therefore, committing idolatry.

The high rate of sexual immorality in our world is a great concern. The sacredness of marriage, of sexual union, and of the body have been weakened by sexual revolution and its ideologies. We know all kinds of sexual sins beleaguering our society and causing great harm to our society’s sexual morality. Unfortunately, our world seems to be at the mercy of evil forces against sexual sacredness, sanity and morality. Let us not be among those under the spell of the sexual evil forces. May the Holy Spirit that guided the Council of Jerusalem guide and sustain us. As Jesus prays for us in the Gospel, “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you all of that I told you.” Amen.

Men from Judea came with their teaching which caused dissension, upset and disturbed the peace of mind of the Christian communities. There may be “men from Judea” in your life at the moment, causing dissension, upsetting and disturbing your peace of mind. Jesus knows this and he says to us, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.” The peace Jesus gives is called inner peace, which is a state of being mentally and spiritually tranquil, with knowledge and understanding to keep oneself strong in the face of “men from Judea’s” discord, stress, dissension, upset and disturbances. On the other hand, let us not be “men from Judea” in other people’s life. Let us pray with St. Paul for inner peace: “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace” (Colossians 3:15). Amen.

Prayer for Peace of Mind

Fortify me with the grace of Your Holy Spirit
and give Your peace to my soul
that I may be free from all needless anxiety,
solicitude and worry.
Help me to desire always that which is
pleasing and acceptable to You
so that Your will may be my will.
Amen.

(Saint Francesca Xavier Cabrini, 1850-1917)

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