

May 13, 2020  
Wednesday of the 5<sup>th</sup> Week of Easter

**Acts 15:1-6**

**John 15:1-8**

Today's Activities & Tasks

- Ready Daily Readings
- Reflection from Fr. Brian Johnson
- Prayer and Challenge for the Day
- Video: “The Sacraments – Episode 1” from Word on Fire Institute
- Pray for Life Monthly Prayer Guide

Reflection Easter Week 5 Wednesday Acts 15:1-6 & John 15:1-8

***Judea, we have a problem!*** It sounds like some inspectors from Jerusalem make a visit to Antioch and try to institute new directives regarding salvation and we Church suddenly have a problem. As some religious leaders came from Jerusalem, they brought with them the idea of requiring circumcision for salvation that troubled the faithful at Antioch, so much so that Acts 15:2 says, “there arose ***no little dissension and debate*** by Paul and Barnabas with them”. Paul & Barnabas are sent up to Jerusalem to help settle the religious dispute, and this special church convention becomes known as the Council of Jerusalem. Acts 15:6 says, “The apostles and the presbyters met together to see about this matter.” Of course, as fellow believers in Christ, they will be invoking the Holy Spirit to help hold together the church while at the same time settling the difference in belief in continuity with Jesus’ teaching and with an eye to future missionary growth in the church. As Jesus had promised in John 14:26 “*The Advocate, the Holy Spirit .....will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you.*” So the Holy Spirit will guide the Church through this tumultuous Council. How heated were the council discussions? Acts 15:7 says “***After much debate had taken place...***” We hear about the extended speeches (you have to have lengthy speeches at councils, right?) of Paul, Peter and James, and then the matter seems to be amicably settled by the drafting of a solution in the form of an authoritative letter to be read and taught to all the churches (some have suggested that the actual Letter of James in New Testament is the long version of this dispute solution-while others compare it to a Dead Sea Scroll text 4QMMT). Regardless, the Holy Spirit seems to open a 3<sup>rd</sup> way between keeping all of the Old Law and throwing out all of the Old Law. So, the summary notes of the Council become the settled teaching that included four main practices to observe (circumcision gets omitted). The four cardinal practices were to 1) avoid pollution from idols, 2) no unlawful marriage, 3) don’t eat meat of strangled animals, and 4) avoid all blood (Acts 15:20). Likely, I

have mentioned it before, but it may be hard for us to imagine how burdensome and particular (picky) the dietary laws of the Old Testament were in addition to the purity practices and required cleansings (If you think the IRS Tax Code is difficult, check out Deuteronomy 14 or Leviticus 11). Yet, through Paul and Barnabas' great work among the Gentiles, the Church is called to face the problem of reconciling a genuine respect for past traditions and the need for updating practices to accommodate new members to the faith who do not have the luxury of knowing the origin and history of such past customs.

Yet, it is also easy to underestimate how much was being asked for from an orthodox person of Jewish background to let go of the revered practice of circumcision. This custom was the sign of the covenant established with Abraham so long ago. However, we have to acknowledge that there were multiple signs of covenant with God, such as the rainbow with Noah, The Temple (or 'everlasting house') for David/Solomon and the Sabbath & Passover with Moses. It does seem clear though that by the time of Jesus, especially through His words declared at the Last Supper, that all previous covenants and signs were to be surpassed by the New Covenant in His Blood (what we call Mass or the Holy Eucharist). As He says in Luke 22:19-20 "This is my body, which will be given for you; ***do this in memory of me.....This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you.***" That seems to say to me that Christ's new covenantal practice to be performed by everyone bearing His name is to break bread and share the cup, as members of His people one in His Body and Blood. Yet, that is faith and like any spiritual remedy or solution (as we see in that Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15) it requires the Holy Spirit in our hearts (Romans 5:5) to make such a believing assent to His Words. Thanks be to God for faith, and for the Holy Spirit keeping alive the tradition of the Apostles from then until now!

#### **Prayer for the Day:**

O Lord Jesus Christ, who in this wonderful Sacrament have left unto us a memorial of your passion: Grant us, we pray, so to venerate the sacred mysteries of your Body and Blood, that we may ever perceive within ourselves the fruit of your redemption and by your grace conform our lives ever more and more unto thy image, You-Our Shepherd, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

#### **Challenge for the Day:**

Spend 15 minutes rereading any one of the accounts of the Last Supper (Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-25; Luke 22:7-20; John 13:1-30), and let Jesus' sacrificial words soak into your heart. Offer thanksgiving prayer to Jesus for such a lasting memorial of His presence among His people. What a blessing we can be part of such a mystery of God!

## **The Sacraments**

Watch for free Episode 1 of The Sacraments Series  
from Word on Fire Institute

## **The Sacraments: Episode 1**

## **Pray For Life**

Here is Pray For Life May 2020 Monthly Prayer Guide

## **USCCB Pray for Life**