

'HOMILY ON THE SPIRIT' – 1 MAY 2016

Today's 1st Reading is from Acts of the Apostles Chapter 15 verses 1-2 and 22-29.

It tells the story of the Council of Jerusalem around 50AD.

We hear about Paul and Barnabas, the decision of the gathered assembly, and the actions to follow. We hear of the presenting issues and how the Holy Spirit guided them.

As WE PONDER in the SPIRIT, issues in OUR OWN LIVES, parish community, local, state and national issues, we too are called to be open to where the Spirit leads.

This weekend we have a WONDERFUL opportunity to be WELCOMING to REFUGEE FAMILIES VISITING US.

They have survived civil war and persecution.

We pray in the Spirit, that we will
LISTEN to them,
RESPECT the stories of their journeys,
PRAY with them,
ENJOY a cuppa with them,
BE PATIENT as we use interpreters to converse,
BE OPEN to whatever surprises the Holy Spirit puts before us,
And they can feel our welcome for them

The months ahead in our parish will contain SURPRISES.

The first reading speaks of an enormous change in the thinking of the early Christian Community. We too will continue to change.

Vatican Radio on April 28, 2016 carries a report on Pope Francis' message at Thursday's Mass.

Pope Francis speaks about the Council of Jerusalem in the middle of the first century AD, the Holy Spirit and surprise. The article is full of wisdom.

As we ponder in the Holy Spirit where God leads us, a section of the article is provided below as a guide.

"... It's the Spirit who, from the very beginning, gives strength to the apostles to proclaim the Gospel and it's the Spirit who carries the Church forward despite its problems."

Even when there is an outbreak of persecution, the Pope said, It's the Spirit who gives believers the strength to stand firm in the faith, even if they face resistance and anger from the doctors of the law.

In the passage from Acts, the Pope noted, there was a double resistance to the Spirit, from those who believed that Jesus came only for the chosen people and from those who wanted to impose the law of Moses, including the practice of circumcision, on those who had converted.

There was great confusion over all this, the Pope said, but the Spirit led their hearts in a new direction.

The apostles were surprised by the Spirit, he said, as they found themselves in new and unthinkable situations. But how were they to manage these circumstances?

Pope Francis said the passage begins by noting that, *'much debate had taken place': no doubt heated debate, because on the one hand they were pushed on and on by the Spirit, but on the other, they were facing new situations that they had never seen or even imagined, such as pagans receiving the Holy Spirit.*

The disciples were holding a 'hot potato' in their hands and didn't know what to do, the Pope said.

Thus they called a meeting in Jerusalem where each one could recount their experiences of how the Holy Spirit had been received by the Gentiles. And in the end they came to an agreement.

But first, the Pope noted,

"The whole assembly fell silent, and they listened while Paul and Barnabas described the signs and wonders God had worked among the Gentiles through them."

Never be afraid to listen with humility, the Pope said.

When you are afraid to listen, you don't have the Spirit in your heart.

When the apostles had listened, they decided to send several of the disciples to the Greeks, the pagan communities that had become Christians to reassure them.

Those who converted, the Pope continued, were not obliged to be circumcised.

The decision was communicated to them in a letter, in which the disciples say that,

"The Holy Spirit and we have decided..."

This is the way of the Church when faced with novelties, the Pope said.

Not the worldly novelties of fashion, but the novelties of the Spirit who always surprises us.

How does the Church resolve these problems?

Through meetings and discussions, listening and praying, before making a final decision.

This is the way of the Church when the Spirit surprises us, Pope Francis said, recalling the resistance that emerged in recent times during the Second Vatican Council.

That resistance continues today in one way or another, he said, yet the Spirit moves ahead.

And the way the Church expresses its communion is through synodality, by meeting, listening, debating, praying and deciding..."

[Fr. Gerry Hefferan – Homily on the Spirit – 1 May 2016]

[Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/050116.cfm>]

[Vatican Radio article referred to <http://tinyurl.com/hs9f3vm>]