

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

From the start, your tone should suggest that there is tension to resolve.

It was Pharisee converts who insisted on the need for circumcision.

You can be sure Paul argued vehemently, but without success. So, the decision is "kicked upstairs" to Jerusalem.

Left out here is the discussion in Jerusalem. It is the *Jerusalem* elders who send representatives back to Antioch.

Antioch = AN-tee-ahk

Barsabbas = bar-SAH-buhs

Silas = Sī-luhs

The goal of the letter is to unburden the Gentile believers, so your tone is apologetic and pastoral.

LECTIONARY #57

READING I Acts 15:1-2, 22-29

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

Some who had come down from Judea were instructing the brothers,

"Unless you are circumcised according to the Mosaic practice, you cannot be saved."

Because there arose no little dissension and debate

by Paul and Barnabas with them,

it was decided that Paul, Barnabas, and some of the others should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about this question.

The apostles and elders, in agreement with the whole church, decided to choose representatives and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.

The ones chosen were Judas, who was called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers.

This is the letter delivered by them:

"The apostles and the elders, your brothers, to the brothers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia of Gentile origin: greetings.

Since we have heard that some of our number who went out without any mandate from us have upset you with their teachings and disturbed your peace of mind,

READING I

Paul's journey throughout the Mediterranean region was greatly successful in bringing Gentiles to the faith. Unlike the Church in Jerusalem, Paul did not require circumcision for Gentile converts. How Gentiles were to become a part of the community of believers was the first major controversy of the early Church, bringing leaders together in Jerusalem to decide the question. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul writes about this controversy in harsh terms, stating that Peter was clearly wrong, and many of the Jews were hypocrites (Galatians 2:11, 13). In Luke's

account in Acts, the controversy is handled more peacefully, and agreement reached by all parties. The narrative shows both the debated question and the process the Church used to solve it.

It isn't surprising that at least some Jewish Christians expected Gentiles to be circumcised. The first disciples of Jesus were Jews, and they continued to observe the religious practices of the people of the covenant. Since Gentiles who joined the Jewish faith accepted its rituals and practices, the believers in Jerusalem presumed that converts to the Christian faith would

do the same. But Paul's practice among the Gentiles outside of Palestine did not require the ritual of circumcision. When Luke says there was "no little dissension" he means that there was in fact a great uproar and division. Because the unity of the Church was at stake, the two sides had to come together.

Much of the process for reaching a decision is omitted from today's reading, but it is helpful in understanding how the believers addressed their differing practices. The process begins with bringing the representatives together and debating, not

They spend much time substantiating the level of discernment that took place.

beloved = bee-LUHV-uhd

Stress the role of the Spirit in the decision. You can list the directives rather quickly.

The role of the Law is not eliminated; "If you . . . you will be doing what is right."

For meditation and context:

TO KEEP IN MIND

Pay attention to the pace of your reading. Varying the pace gives listeners clues to the meaning of the text. The most common problem for proclaimers new to the ministry is going too fast to be understood.

we have with **one accord** decided to choose **representatives** and to **send** them to you along with our **beloved Barnabas** and **Paul**,
who have dedicated their **lives** to the **name** of our **Lord Jesus Christ**.

So we are sending **Judas** and **Silas** who will also convey this same message by word of mouth: 'It is the **decision** of the **Holy Spirit** and of us not to **place** on you any **burden** beyond these **necessities**, **namely**, to **abstain** from **meat sacrificed to idols**, from **blood**, from **meats of strangled animals**, and from **unlawful marriage**.
If you keep **free** of these, you will be doing what is **right**. **Farewell.**'"

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8 (4)

R. O God, let all the nations praise you!
or R. Alleluia.

May God have pity on us and bless us;
may he let his face shine upon us.
So may your way be known upon earth;
among all nations, your salvation.

May the nations be glad and exult
because you rule the peoples in equity;
the nations on the earth you guide.

May the peoples praise you, O God;
may all the peoples praise you!
May God bless us,
and may all the ends of the earth fear him!

in the sense of one side winning and the other losing, but investigating and discussing. Part of the investigating involves remembering and relating their experiences, that of Paul as well as Peter. James, the leader of the Jerusalem Church, correlates these experiences with Scripture, and makes a judgment that is announced in the letter reported in today's reading. The letter is then promulgated by personal representatives, Paul and Barnabas, to the Gentile Christians. The decision, ultimately coming from the Holy Spirit, does not demand circumcision, but only abiding by

norms that allow the Gentile and Jewish Churches to live in peace.

READING II Revelation uses and interprets highly symbolic biblical images that would be well known to the original audience of persecuted Christians near the end of the first century. Today's reading begins with a high mountain, symbolic place of revelation and divine nearness. The most developed symbol in the vision is the holy city, Jerusalem. When Revelation was written, the real, historical city was in ruins, the temple destroyed, and

the people discouraged by their loss. But the Jerusalem of the vision gleams with God's own splendor and is radiant. The city's massive high wall has twelve gates, inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Added to the names of the ancient tribes are the names of the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb who are the foundations of the city. The number twelve, both for Israel's tribes and Jesus' Apostles, signifies fullness or completeness, and suggests that the city itself is symbolic of the people as a whole, all of them chosen by God. The verse just before today's reading prepares

This is the fifth of six consecutive weeks we read from Revelation.

This is not your typical opening line, even in Scripture. Read slowly and significantly.

Here, your *tone* will communicate more than the words will!

Stress this reference to the twelve tribes of Israel.

Don't shy from these repetitions; give them a grand and regal tone.

As Israel was built on the foundation of the twelve tribes, the New Covenant is built on the foundation of the Twelve Apostles.

Give the explanation that the city needed no Temple or illumination with mounting conviction and joy.

READING II Revelation 21:10–14, 22–23

A reading from the Book of Revelation

The **angel** took me in **spirit** to a **great, high mountain** and **showed me the holy city Jerusalem** coming down out of heaven from God.

It **gleamed** with the **splendor of God**.

Its **radiance** was like that of a **precious stone**, like **jasper, clear as crystal**.

It had a **massive, high wall**, with **twelve gates** where **twelve angels** were stationed and on which **names** were **inscribed**, the **names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites**.

There were **three gates** facing **east**, **three north**, **three south**, and **three west**.

The **wall of the city** had **twelve courses of stones** as its **foundation**, on which were inscribed the **twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb**.

I saw **no temple** in the city for its **temple** is the **Lord God almighty** and the **Lamb**. The **city** had **no need of sun or moon to shine** on it, for the **glory of God** gave it **light**, and its **lamp** was the **Lamb**.

for this personalized meaning of the city, when the guiding angel says, "Come here. I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

The vision is reminiscent of that of Ezekiel, whose picture of Jerusalem was also on a high mountain (40:2). Much of Ezekiel's account is of the temple itself, with its walls, gates, and courts, its rituals and sacrifices. But the Jerusalem of Revelation has no temple. The Lord God almighty and the Lamb are the temple, the divine dwelling place. The people abiding with this temple need neither sun nor

moon to shine on them, for the Lamb, the risen Lord Jesus, gives the people all the light they need. The visions of Revelation, so often filled with fearful symbols of destruction, present a vision of hope for the whole people, in whose presence is the living temple of God.

GOSPEL In Jesus' lengthy communication to his disciples at their last supper together, he gives them words of comfort even as he prepares them for his impending suffering and death. In this portion of his discourse, Jesus juxta-

poses the sad news that he will soon be leaving them with the assurance that he will still remain with them, a paradox they cannot yet understand. Further, not only will Jesus himself be with them, but also the Father and the Holy Spirit, sharing such an intimacy that Jesus and his Father will make their dwelling, their permanent home, with those who love him.

As he is about to leave them, Jesus announces his farewell gifts. First, his Father will send them the Advocate (*paracletos*), the Holy Spirit. Shortly before the words spoken here, Jesus had already