

## Homily Easter 6C: 5 May 2013: HT-W/XII-PC

If you follow media coverage of the Catholic Church, you might think she was a political institution, and a most dysfunctional institution at that. Just consider the papal transition a couple months ago. The church was constantly analyzed in terms of various ideological blocs: liberal v. conservative, progressives v. traditionalists. Talking heads speculated about which geographic constituency would prevail: would the new pope come from Europe, or Africa, or America; or would the Italians recover the papacy for one of their own. And there was a lot of talk about whether the new pope would be a reformer, reforming the Vatican Curia in particular, or whether entrenched parties there would hold on to their prerogatives. Politics, politics, and more politics.

Of course, there is a political dimension to the Catholic Church. I've had something of an insider's view of the complicated workings inside this institution since entering seminary almost 20 years ago. Any gathering of human beings, even a tiny group like a family, has political aspects: just consider family dynamics--how children, siblings, spouses, and parents try to promote their interests at home. Human beings are political animals-- that's as much a defining trait of our species as having an opposing thumb. And human beings don't lose their political instincts when they enter Church, not even when they receive Holy Orders.

But there is a much more important dimension to the Church. And that is the reality of the Holy Spirit moving within her, sanctifying and instructing her members. We see that with special clarity in today's first reading. It recounts the first council of the church, the council of Jerusalem. There the church wrestled with the critical question of which if any prescriptions of the Mosaic Law should be imposed on Gentiles who had converted to the Catholic faith. Should these former pagans undergo circumcision? Should they observe the Jewish dietary laws? After a much discussion among the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, which conversation undoubtedly involved much political activity, the council reached a decision. Most critical for our purposes is the language of their statement: It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us.

The Church of the apostolic age understood herself to be an institution animated by the Holy Spirit. And when the Church's leadership gathered in solemn assembly to consider questions of crucial import for her members, they saw their decisions as being guided by the same Holy Spirit. The Church back then, like the Church today, had a lot of politics going on. There were Christians of the Pharisee party who felt that the Mosaic law should be imposed on the Gentiles. There were folks like Paul and Barnabas who were completely against this idea. And so there was probably no small amount of heated debate at that council of Jerusalem almost 2000 years ago. But out of all that political messiness, there spoke the voice of the Spirit which taught and directed the Church how to move forward.

In the Gospel, we hear the Lord's promise to send the Holy Spirit to teach his disciples everything. That is a promise we must hold onto with all firmness in these turbulent times, for the Spirit who teaches is also the one who gives us the peace of Christ, the peace which the world can neither give nor take away. During this Year of Faith, we're being encouraged to revisit the most recent council of the Church, that is, the 2nd Vatican Council. I hope and pray we take the opportunity to listen to the Spirit's voice which was channeled through that great council 50 years ago. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, whose 20th anniversary is also being marked this year, we have an excellent means to do so. In this monumental work, we rediscover the ancient Catholic faith that was renewed at Vatican II, now expressed in systematic format and contemporary language. May we let the Holy Spirit speak to our hearts during this Year of Faith, that our own faith may be renewed and our hearts may be consoled by the precious peace of Christ.