

5th Thursday Easter 2004

Acts 15:7-21

After much debate had taken place,
Peter got up and said to the Apostles and the presbyters,
"My brothers, you are well aware that from early days
God made his choice among you that through my mouth
the Gentiles would hear the word of the Gospel and believe.
And God, who knows the heart,
bore witness by granting them the Holy Spirit
just as he did us.
He made no distinction between us and them,
for by faith he purified their hearts.
Why, then, are you now putting God to the test
by placing on the shoulders of the disciples
a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?
On the contrary, we believe that we are saved
through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they."
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.

After they had fallen silent, James responded,
"My brothers, listen to me.
Symeon has described how God first concerned himself
with acquiring from among the Gentiles a people for his name.
The words of the prophets agree with this, as is written:

After this I shall return
and rebuild the fallen hut of David;
from its ruins I shall rebuild it
and raise it up again,
so that the rest of humanity may seek out the Lord,
even all the Gentiles on whom my name is invoked.
Thus says the Lord who accomplishes these things,
known from of old.

It is my judgment, therefore,
that we ought to stop troubling the Gentiles who turn to God,
but tell them by letter to avoid pollution from idols,
unlawful marriage, the meat of strangled animals, and blood.
For Moses, for generations now,
has had those who proclaim him in every town,
as he has been read in the synagogues every sabbath."

Jn 15:9-11

Jesus said to his disciples:
"As the Father loves me, so I also love you.
Remain in my love.
If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my
love,
just as I have kept my Father's commandments
and remain in his love.

"I have told you this so that

my joy might be in you and
your joy might be complete."

What is this debate that Acts is talking about?
This is nothing less than the great Council of
Jerusalem. The same event is even recorded
by Paul in Galatians. This council charted the
future of the Church. It determined who we
were as Christians, what our relationship was
with God and with each other. Our gospel
reading today touches upon the same question.
Who are Jesus' disciples?

Originally, Christians were Jews who followed
Jesus, the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy. Now
non-Jews were experiencing the grace of the
Spirit. Does a Christian need to be a Jew first?
Does a Christian need to follow the
proscriptions of Jewish law? We think of
Jewish law as revolving around the 10
Commandments. If you were to talk to a Jew,
they would say that God's covenant with them
requires them to follow some 600+
commandments. Peter got it right when he said
"Why then are you now placing on the
shoulders of the disciples a yoke that neither
our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?"
If we as a people could "do the right thing" all
the time, where is the need for God's saving
grace? History shows we haven't been doing
so hot on our own in achieving salvation, a just
and peaceful world. Then comes Peter's great
statement: "We believe we are saved through
the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as
they"

The Gospel continues this theme of salvation.
It comes from the discourses between the last
supper and Jesus' arrest. Again, we hear about
keeping Jesus' commandments.
Understanding what Jesus' commandments are
is clarified if I add v. 12: "This is my
commandment: love one another as I love
you".

A relationship with our creator is not
complicated. I'm not saying easy, just not
complicated. Receive God's offered grace, love
one another, and be saved, in this world and
unto eternity when we pass to the other side.