

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (Year C)

May 26, 2019

Acts 15:1–2, 22–29 • Revelation 21:10–14, 22–23 • John 14:23–29

I.

Last Sunday's 11:00 a.m. Mass was spectacular:
the First Holy Communion of children.

It was a joy to see the children walk the length of the nave
as they approach the altar to receive the holy sacrament.

And I loved seeing their parents walking behind them,
carrying their lighted baptismal candle.

A beautiful moment for the children, their families, and the parish.

In receiving the Eucharist,
the children deepened their relationship with Christ.

The Son of God now dwells within them in a fuller way.

At the same time,
the children have taken another step in their Christian initiation;
that is, their membership in the Church.

And the Eucharist is already an experience
—a foretaste, the Church calls it—
of heaven.

II.

The readings for today's Mass allude to these three interrelated themes:
membership, heaven, and in-dwelling.

These themes correlate with the Church and its place in our lives.

The First Reading narrates the resolution of a combustible issue
at the beginning of the Church's history:
how were Gentiles to join the Church?

Specifically, must non-Jews observe the Mosaic Law—especially dietary restrictions and circumcision—in order to be Christians?

After much controversy, it was decided that observance of the Mosaic Law was unnecessary:

“It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities.”

The Second Reading comes from the Book of Revelation, which is read throughout the Easter season.

The passage depicts the Church in heaven.

It is likened to a new Jerusalem, and is named after the city that was the site of pivotal events in salvation history:

“The angel... showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. ... 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.”

The perfection of the Church marks the fulfillment of the divine plan—the gathering of the elect—who live with God:

“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.”

Heaven is not a place.

No, heaven is communion: dwelling with Jesus Christ, and through him, dwelling with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Heaven is also fellowship with all others who are in heaven: the communion of saints.

So, the gathering of the Church not only continues in heaven;
the Church's perfection is heaven.

The Gospel touches on the theme of dwelling:

“Whoever loves me will keep my word,
and my Father will love him,
and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.”

The context of Jesus' words is significant:
he's speaking to the Apostles at the Last Supper,
which of course, is depicted so beautifully in the reredos behind the altar.

Here, at the institution of the Eucharist,
Jesus is forming the Church,
with the Apostles as the nucleus.

We can perceive the constitutive elements of the Church in the Gospel reading:
the Eucharist, the Apostles, and the Holy Spirit:

“I have told you this while I am with you.
The Advocate, the Holy Spirit,
whom the Father will send in my name,
will teach you everything
and remind you of all that I told you.”

Ultimately, our relationship with God includes the Church.

There's no such thing as a private relationship with the Lord:
“just me and God.”

There is only a personal relationship with God,
which includes the Church.

Because Jesus speaks to all of us, not just to one of us,
or not just to a few of us.

And when Christ speaks of he and his Father's in-dwelling,
he's desires that for all people.

III.

Before the First Holy Communion Mass,
I posed for a picture with the group of communicants.

All of them were there,
in their white dresses, suits, veils, and, of course, those clip-on ties.

Folded, prayerful hands and lots of smiles—and rightly so.

It was a great day for them, for their families, and for the parish.

A new group of followers has deepened their relationship with Christ,
and with the Church.

In them, we vividly see what God does for us.

He gathers us, he nourishes us through Christ's Death and Resurrection,
and he builds up a community.

Christ forms us into his Church,
which continues its journey to heaven.