



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

6th Sunday of Easter – Year C

Readings: *Acts 15: 1-2, 22-29, Ps 66, Ap 21: 10-14, 22-23, John 14: 23-29*

It would be no exaggeration to say that few generations of Catholics have been more defined by a Council of the Church than ours.

The Second Vatican Council, initially the third of three ideas of Pope John XXIII during his brief pontificate, was proposed as a non-doctrinal look at the way in which the Church engaged with the post-war world of modernity. It burgeoned, mainly after his death, into a huge and all encompassing review of just about every aspect of church life. Its documents, which remarkably few Catholics seem to actually have read, are quoted as the definitive statements on everything and yet, where inconvenient as in the liturgy, largely ignored.

Vatican II became a byword for change. It has assumed the status of a sort of ecclesiastical YEAR ZERO in its revolutionary mandate. Little that has gone before it is now quoted. All authority seems to emanate from it.

Benedict XVI (one of the bright young men of the Council) expressed his concern by his contrasting ‘the hermeneutic of continuity’ with the ‘hermeneutic of rupture’. He, after all, with St John Paul II, spent much of their pontificates trying to reconnect the interpretation of the Council with the history of the Faith. What emerged from that Council, under the byline, ‘The Spirit of Vatican II’, was, all too often a clean or not so clean break with the past. Nowhere was this more noticeable than at the praying heart of the Church, the celebration of the Mass. For many years liturgical chaos

reigned. Even today most liturgical practice is not in line with the Vatican II document on the Liturgy.

Of course Benedict & John Paul II were correct. NO Council stands alone. It must build upon and pay attention to its long line of predecessors for, if it is indeed the same Holy Spirit at work and inspiring the Fathers of the Church in Council, then there will be observable consistency and continuity.

The hundreds of pages that comprise the final documents of Second Vatican Council are in stark contrast to the few verses in the Acts of the Apostles that address us today on that most significant and foundational Council of the Church, the Council of Jerusalem.

There is a crisis in the nascent church. The Jewish homeland is very divided about the new emerging sect, The Way – later nicknamed ‘Christians’. This division is equally reflected in the diaspora.

To most people’s surprise there is a very favourable response from Gentiles. Many of them are drawn to the stricter morality of Judaism and a rejection of that paganism which worships the dark dealing of the vicious and amoral Pantheon. So the Church is faced with a dilemma. Can the Gentiles be included and, if so, must they be subject to the whole of the preceding Covenant of Jewish Law?

The witnesses are called. Paul and Barnabas testify to their success among the Gentiles, the many conversions in their ranks. Paul has, of course, already told his conversion story in which the role of the Jews is a critical feature. The Law has been superseded and fulfilled in Christ Jesus.

To this is added the vision of Peter at Joppa, his encounter with the Lord and his consequent calling to evangelise the Gentiles. He has witnessed at first hand the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Gentile believers. Like Paul & Barnabas he has come to embrace the universal church.

The key question then remains...if the Gentiles are ‘in’ can an observant Jew share the table and the altar with them or must there be two tables and a consequently divided ‘ecclesia’?

After much discussion of this as a reality and how the Church should handle it, all eyes turn to James. He is head of the Jerusalem church and

most in touch with the fundamental Jewishness of the young church. He would today be labelled a conservative probably.

On the basis of historical and prophetic scriptural witness, James declares for a policy of inclusion with minimum basic requirements to fulfil the Law.

This declaration and its acceptance by the Council of Jerusalem, has incalculable implications for the future of the FAITH. It means that there is ONE CHURCH, Catholic and Apostolic. And it means that YOU and I can be part of it. There is no more significant decision to be made in the whole history of the Councils of the Church. Let us thank God for The Council of Jerusalem and the Spirit filled wisdom and courage of the Fathers of the Universal Church.