**Sixth Sunday of Easter C May 22, 2022 Dcn. Frank Olmsted**

**Acts 15.1-2, 22-29 Revelation 21.10-14, 22-23 John 14.23-29**

**St. Cletus Parish 7:30 and 9:30 masses**

 **Acts of the Apostles takes us into a crucial moment of the 1st century Church. St. Luke wrote, “Because there arose no little dissension and debate by Paul and Barnabas with them (those who had come down from Jerusalem), it was decided that Paul, Barnabas, and some of the others should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about the question” of whether to become a follower of Christ, you must first become Jewish, and learn and practice all the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law. At this time in the Church most new converts came from Judaism and thus came from a life of close adherence to the 613 prescriptions of the Law of Moses. This wasn’t a bad thing. Jesus followed the Mosaic Law. The problem was that in the Jewish way of thinking, salvation was essentially earned by knowing and keeping every letter of the Law. Jesus taught and demonstrated something quite different. While the Mosaic Law is good and important, it does not, in and of itself, gain a person eternal salvation. God wants to save us from sin and offer us eternal life through a personal relationship with Him. We cannot earn it. Relationships are not earned; they are offered and then accepted or rejected. If accepted, the relationship adds something, and changes everything about our lives. Thus, the whole theology of the redemptive nature of Jesus’ death and resurrection rested upon the decision the Church leaders made here in what has come to be known as the Council of Jerusalem that gathered in 49 or 50.**

 **This was a titanic shift for Christians who had come from Judaism and still maintained many of the beliefs and practices of the Jewish faith while embracing Jesus. Well of course, you work hard, follow all the laws and rules of the faith and earn eternal life. How could it be otherwise? Jesus’ point was, how can anyone do anything that warrants eternal life. That is a gift beyond earning no matter what you do, but God wants you to have it and offers it to you. You can accept it and then live in accord with the gift, as Jesus said in the gospel, “Whoever loves me will keep my Word, or you can walk away from it.**

 **Accepting this gift and then living it, however, is crucial and not easy.**

**Actor-director Woody Allen once noted, “Standing in a garage no more makes you a car than standing in a church makes you a Christian.” The actor Martin Sheen said it well, “It doesn’t really matter how much of the rules or the dogma we accepted and lived by if we’re not really living by a fundamental creed of the Catholic Church, which is service to others and finding God in ourselves and then seeing God in everyone including our enemies.” Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever loves me will keep my Word,” that is, will live my Word day in and day out in their lives.**

 **Woody Allen, while not my go-to guy for how to best live life, had another perceptive insight: “The only thing standing between me and greatness is me.” We might say, the only thing standing between me and the greatness that comes from serving Christ is me. Jesus has shown the way of service. He won’t force me to receive this gift. I stand between Christ and his people who need his help, help that he calls me to give them. I can say yes and enable his will to be accomplished or say no and obstruct his will. In Christianity the only true greatness comes through service, and I am the only thing standing between me and that Christian greatness.**

 **Don’t we often fall back into that “I can earn it” mentality? If I get to church every Sunday, keep the ten commandments pretty well, follow the Lenten rules, and live as a nice, decent-enough person, then surely, I have completed my obligations and can presume to punch my card for heaven eventually. I’ve checked the obvious religious boxes, and should be good to go. That keeps me in control of it all. Thought of a real and personal relationship with Christ may never enter into the equation. It sounds nice and relatively easy; the problem is, this is not what Jesus spoke of in the gospels. God doesn’t want us to hand him a card full of punches; he actually wants each of us to come to know him and have a personal, permanent, committed relationship with him.**

 **Thus, whether to impose the Mosaic Law on new gentile Christians was a hot-button issue for the early Church, and they knew it. They had to resolve this issue and they had to do it in a clear and decisive way. The truth that salvation and eternal life is given by God and not something that any of us can earn or take by storm is not something arrived at by wise thinkers or good theologians. It is revealed by God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. That this is so wonderful and really beyond our thinking is demonstrated in the Book of Revelation with its apocalyptic images. “The holy city Jerusalem came down out of heaven from God. It gleamed with the splendor of God. Its radiance was like that of a precious stone.” John said, “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,” Christ Jesus.**

 **Jesuit Father Greg Boyle worked his whole life with gang members in Los Angeles trying to get them out of that lifestyle and into healthy, productive lives in the community. One of the young gang members he worked with told him he had a dream that he and Fr. Greg were in a completely dark room where there was a light and a light switch but they could not see them. Then he said, “Father Greg, you had a flashlight and you turned it on and shined it on the light switch so that I could go over and flip the switch and light the whole room,” and the young man added, “And the light was so much better than the darkness.” We’ve been given that flashlight too in Jesus Christ. He expects us to turn it on so that others can see the light switch, and be illuminated in the light of the Lamb, Jesus the Christ. The only thing standing between me and Christian greatness is me, but it doesn’t have to be that way. I’ve been given a flashlight, but not to turn it on and shine it on myself. The light of Christ is so much better than the darkness.**