

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter (C)  
(Acts 15:1-2.22-29 / John 14:23-29)  
25.05.2025  
*Sentire cum Ecclesia*

During the Easter Season, as we listen to the Acts of the Apostles, we are reminded of the hopes and expectations of the first Christians, of their growth in number and the struggles which marked the life of their communities.

Nevertheless, the stories we hear each Sunday are not just an opportunity for us to make a trip down memory lane, these stories should help us to navigate the twists and turns of life in our Churches today.

From what we heard in our first reading, we can draw forth a few lessons: the first is about the men who “came down from Judaea and taught the brothers, ‘Unless you have yourselves circumcised in the tradition of Moses you cannot be saved’.” We know nothing about these men but there are some who behave in the same way today. These men were right in stressing the importance of circumcision in the Jewish tradition, but they were wrong insofar as they had not updated their theology. There was already some debate going on in Judaism on the subject and unanimity had not been reached on the need for proselytes to be circumcised. These men who insisted upon it were certainly well-intentioned but they were not well-informed.

Another mistake was that, as we heard in the text read, “they acted without any authority from” the apostles and elders. The problem was that they were self-appointed and self-referential missionaries.

Unfortunately there are many people in our Churches who are self-proclaimed teachers and prophets. On the internet for example, many, too many so-called Catholics, speak with authority about theological subjects they know nothing about. They are theologically ill-informed and spiritually dangerous.

A good process of discernment could have helped the men from Judaea to realise that what they were considering to be essential was not essential. Allow me to quote here a statement which has been already mentioned from this pulpit and which is a very useful tool in a discernment process: “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.” The first thing to do when we share our faith, proclaim the Gospel or bear witness to Christ is to be clear about what is essential.

Recently, in a group, a woman explained assertively because she got it from a Catholic podcast that the true Mass should be said in Latin because, I quote “After all, Jesus spoke Latin!” More subtle and more publicised is the statement JD Vance made some months ago. He felt that he could engage in theological debate and show his little knowledge of St Augustine yet he got St Augustine’s thought wrong and was corrected by Pope Francis and by the one who is now Pope Leo.

Let us be clear, it is not because somebody speaks loudly that he or she is right, it is not because something is repeated many times that it is true.

So what we have to learn from the Acts of the Apostles is that we must all be careful when we speak about our faith. Words matter, they can hurt people, mislead and divide communities.

On top of being not well-informed, we may be like the disciples who wanted to have circumcision foisted on the new converts. Sometimes we may try to impose on others our personal devotions and practices.

In his short message on the night of his election, Pope Leo used the word *together* 7 times: “Let us move forward, without fear, *together*, (...) *together* as one people. (...) I also thank my brother Cardinals, who have chosen me to be the Successor of Peter and to walk *together* with you as a Church, united, (...) all of us can journey *together*. (...) *Together*, we must look for ways to be a missionary Church. (...) I would like to pray *together* with you. Let us pray *together* for this new mission, for the whole Church, for peace in the world.” (*Apostolic Blessing*, 08.05.2025)

Pope Leo aptly reminded us that, as Christians, we cannot be independent and free-lance witnesses to Christ. We need one another and we cannot be saved on our own. This explains why Pope Francis initiated the synodal journey for the whole Church, why Pope Leo repeated many times his “intention to continue Pope Francis’ commitment to promoting the synodal nature of the Catholic Church” (*Address*, 19.05.2025).

The men who stirred up division in the community in Antioch did not take the time to discern with others, to listen to what the Spirit was saying to the Church, they were not agents of togetherness and communion.

The Synodal journey is about listening together to the promptings of the Spirit who, according to Jesus, teaches us everything and who will help us work fruitfully against all the ego- and fear-driven politicians and people who are prone to use violence and war to assert their opinions and greed.

Our societies and our Churches are facing many challenges in the areas of medical ethics, sexuality, gender issues, forced migration, economic warfare, and ecology, to name but a few of them. As Christians, we cannot ignore these questions and we have to be ready to be part of the difficult conversations that take place in our Christian communities and in all kinds of secular structures and organisations.

Unlike the men who went down from Judaea to Antioch, we have to listen carefully and speak intelligently... and sometimes we have to learn to be silent simply out of respect for others or because we do not know enough on a particular subject.

Ultimately what matters is to *sentire cum ecclesia*. This Latin expression means to *feel and to think with the Church*, to feel its pain as much as its joy, and as Pope Francis declared, it is to have “a heart that does not close in on itself but beats to the rhythm of a journey undertaken together with all the people faithful to God.” (*Hom.* 03.01.2014)

Schooled by our ancestors in the faith whom we encounter in the Acts of the Apostles, by their mistakes and their achievements, let us learn courageously and with perseverance the way for our Church to become, as Pope Leo invited us, “a small leaven of unity, communion and fraternity within the world.” (*Hom.* 18.05.2025)