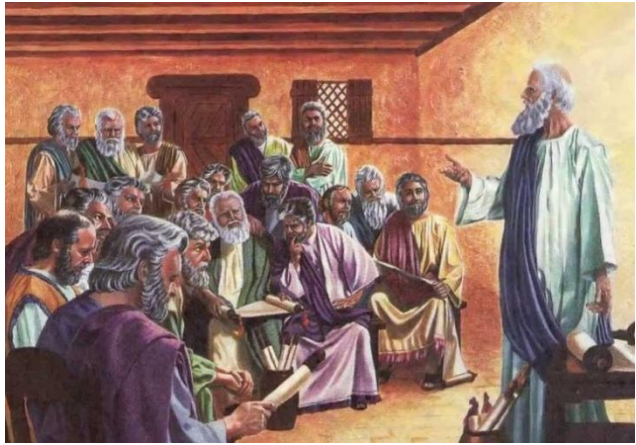


## Homily – May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2025- 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time



I realize that, for you people in the pews, it's more difficult to recall anything you heard in the first or second reading. What's a lot easier to remember is the Gospel reading only because it was the last reading you heard, and the "Jesus stories" seem

to be simpler to get into. Personally, I've always preferred the gospel stories about Jesus over the stories in the Book of Revelation about dragons with seven heads and ten horns.

Having said that, let's go back to the first reading. It may have something to teach us about what true authority means and how power can be abused. But first a little background to get us going.

If the first-century Church was to survive and thrive without the physical presence of Jesus, it had to rely on the Holy Spirit which Jesus promised and delivered. The Church also had to rely on their own common sense and good judgment. It appears, from that first reading from Acts of the Apostles, that these first followers of Christ did precisely that. It says, **"For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden..."** "Holy Spirit" and "us" must always come together if we are to make good

decisions about how to move forward as Church. Without God we cannot; without us, God will not.

Peter, the head of the Church, along with elders remained in Jerusalem after the death and resurrection of Jesus, at least, initially. Perhaps they wanted to establish a strong base in Jerusalem before going out to spread the Good News elsewhere. Paul, on the other hand, had his homebase away from Jerusalem in a place called Antioch. The Apostles in Jerusalem probably preferred to have Paul at a safe distance because he still carried the baggage of his past as being a fierce persecutor of Christians before his own conversion.

That first reading starts with individuals from Peter's community in Jerusalem who go to Paul's community in Antioch. These individuals sowed dissention in the Christian community in Antioch and upset Paul and the other members. They insisted anyone coming into the Church must first follow all the laws of the Jewish faith, including circumcision, before they could be members. For them, the law of Moses must be adhered to before one could become a follower of Jesus. Paul was very uncomfortable with this way of thinking even though he was, until his recent conversion, a strict observer of every Jew law.

Paul was not one of the original 12 Apostles, but he did recognize Peter's authority as head of the Church. So, rather than making decisions on his own, Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to seek the advice of Peter and the elders. Paul was pretty sure that Peter would agree with him that newcomers

to the Church, Gentiles, would not have to jump through all the hoops of becoming “Jewish” first and follow all the Jewish laws in order to become Christian. It’s something good for us to ask ourselves. Do we make it hard for people to come to Christ? Do we lay heavy burdens on people, putting man-made laws before peoples’ relationship with Jesus?

Peter did agree with Paul and encouraged Paul to keep welcoming the Gentiles into the Church. He told Paul, “I don’t know who those trouble makers were that came from my community here in Jerusalem. I certainly didn’t sent them to your community in Antioch to cause the trouble they did. Don’t listen to them; they’re acting without any authority. And don’t put any further burden on people who want to join the Church.” Peter probably appreciated the fact that Paul came and consulted him. Paul recognized Peter’s authority, but Peter does something remarkable—he recognizes Paul’s authority. Peter turns to the elders assembled and says, “You see these two guys, Paul and Barnabas, who came to us from Antioch? These two guys ought to be listened to because they have risked their lives for our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Peter, the head of the Church, recognized the suffering Paul and Barnabas already went through in being faithful followers of Jesus. Peter might be the head of the Church, but the witness of Paul and Barnabas risking their lives, for their faith, carried more authority than Peter’s title as the first pope.

Paul, with the support of Peter, must have made the refrain to our psalm his mantra in life: “Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise

you.” When it says, “all the people” it means “all the people” and not just the Jewish people, and not just those who follow the Jewish laws. The criterion for joining the Church should simply be your desire to do so. I’ve never met anyone who wasn’t seeking God, meaning, or a community where they can feel at home. However, I have met people, including clergy, who have put up barriers to other peoples’ search for God, meaning and community. When that happens, faith isn’t necessarily destroyed—it is just sought in places outside our church buildings.

Who is a voice of authority in your life? Before I pledge obedience to a bishop, I better know that my true allegiance is always to Christ. And if there is a clash between the two, I’ll put my last quarter down on the side of Christ whose guest list, at the banquet table, includes the prostitutes and tax collectors. These are the ones who are going into the Kingdom way ahead of the one who says, “there’s no salvation outside the Catholic Church.”

Brennan Manning in his book titled Abba’s Child writes, **“Yes, indeed this man (Jesus) was truly a Rabbi unlike any other in Palestine. He may never have studied under a great teacher; He had no degree. He was a layman, an uneducated Galilean peasant, but His Word thundered with authority: He was the Great Rabbi because his being and His doing, like His humanity and His divinity, were one.”**

When we are one, we have no more need to push people away, nor more need to make them bend to burdensome rules. When we are one, we recognize

there is no longer the world of circumcised and uncircumcised, Jews and Gentiles, man or woman, the have and have nots, the worthy and the unworthy. There is only the world that Jesus came to tell us about. It's the Kingdom of God, and in that world, every feeble act of love on our part ushers in God who makes His home with us...and never wants to leave.

*~Fr. Phil*