

HOMILY for 6th SUNDAY of EASTER – Year C

This Sunday's Gospel shares with us Jesus' farewell to His disciples as He prepared to return to God the Father. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

A man went on vacation & arranged for his mother to stay at his house & take care of his cat. And just to be sure, he asked his next-door neighbor if he would look in on them every day & make sure they were all right. "No problem," said the neighbor. The man flew off to Paradise Island of Bora Bora; & after a couple of days he called the neighbor & asked how things were going.

"Well," the neighbor said, "your cat died." "Geez," the guy said. "You have to come right out & tell me like that? Couldn't you have a little more consideration? I'm on vacation. Couldn't you have broken it to me a little more gently? Like first telling me that the cat was on the roof, then that the cat fell off the roof, then maybe the next day telling that you had taken the cat to the vet – like that, not *boom* all at once! By the way, how's my mom doing?"

"Well," said the neighbor, "she went up on the roof, then..."

Anyway, as Jesus prepared to return to God the Father & completed His assigned mission of salvation, the Church had to deal with the farewell process with its Master. Here is how this Sunday's Gospel tells us about that process: "...This much have I told you while I was still with you, the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will instruct you in everything, & remind you of all that I told you. 'Peace' is my farewell to you, my peace is my gift to you." We can see that Jesus was preparing to go back to the Father & wanted to leave with us the Holy Spirit to guide us. In addition to the Holy Spirit, He would give us peace as His farewell gift for us. Clearly Jesus was concerned about us & wanted to take good care of His disciples whom He would leave behind. For He knew how hostile & dangerous the world would be to His disciples & His mission of salvation.

We all have had to say farewell to someone or something before. Every time we do that, we know it gets tougher for us. As someone who does the Last Rite & performs Funerals for many Christian families, I have witnessed how painful & sad it is for someone to bid farewell to one's family or friend on those occasions. I have seen the ones who were left behind full of grief & pain as they said goodbye to their deceased loved ones. Once I watched a daughter crying so much over the death of her beloved mother on a hot summer day in a cemetery that she became dehydrated & passed out. Or, recently I attended a Graduation Ceremony at Catholic Central High & saw a young student crying loudly as she hugged her graduated friend. Observing that emotional interaction, I could tell that those two friends have known each other for quite some time; & their friendship meant a lot to each other. Now one of them is left behind as the older one moves on to pursue her future endeavors. By the way, women could cry easily at these farewell occasions, but it would be much harder for men to do that. Once I watched Family Feud, its survey said that men would cry at only four moments: the deaths of their loved ones, their weddings, the births of their first child, & the loss of their sports teams! You could draw your own conclusion if any one of the disciples would cry at Jesus' departure for Heaven. Maybe, only the women would feel sad & shed tears for Him.

Realizing how painful & difficult it must be for His disciples who were left behind, Jesus tried to comfort them & us with the following message in this Sunday's Gospel: "...Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your

hearts to be troubled or afraid. You heard me tell you, 'I am going away & I will come back to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father." Jesus evidently knew how His disciples must have felt with His departure for Heaven. He surely was concerned about their future & survival in this world. But, He assured them & us that He would return to take everyone to His home in Heaven. He also left behind His gift of peace & the Holy Spirit to bring us reassurance & guide us. Those blessings will help us deal with the daily challenges of this world a little easier.

One of those challenges that faced the early Church apparently was the issue of whether the Gentiles would need to be circumcised according to the Jewish customs upon their conversion to the Christian Church. Here is how this Sunday's First Reading explains that problem to us: "Some who had come down from Judea were instructing the brothers, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the Mosaic practice, you cannot be saved.' ...It was decided that Paul, Barnabas, & some of the others should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles & elders about this question... So, we are sending Judas & Silas who will also convey this same message by word of mouth: 'It is the decision of the Holy Spirit & of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities, namely, to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, from blood, from meats of strangled animals, & from unlawful marriage. If you keep free of these, you will be doing what is right. Farewell.'"

Evidently the early Church came out of Judaism & brought along with it some Jewish customs & traditions. Besides inheriting the Jewish belief in only one God, Moses' Ten Commandments, & rest on the Sabbath Day, the early Church also wondered if its Gentile converts would be required to accept the Jewish custom of circumcision before being welcomed into the Christian community. The early Church convened & consulted with the Holy Spirit prayerfully over this issue to figure out how to keep its members rooted in Tradition & the love & peace of Jesus without turning them away or imposing too heavy burden on them. So, they eventually decided to stop requiring new converts to be circumcised & keep the Church requirements on them to the minimum, namely, to avoid worshipping other idols & practicing unlawful marriages & impurity customs. This is a valuable lesson for the Church in modern time to imitate. We must learn from the early Church to keep our rules & regulations to the minimum & focus more on how to welcome new members & save as many souls as possible. That is the dying wish & great hope of our Lord Jesus. We must stop all the infighting over trivial issues & divisions caused by the power of darkness & its allies. If we do not put aside our differences & focus on the common good & saving mission of Jesus, we would soon tear the Church apart & push away all the souls that we are supposed to save.

My dear brothers & sisters, like the sacrifices that our Veterans have made for our country & are commemorated on this Memorial Day weekend, we ought to remember all the sacrifices that the martyrs & the early Church have made for us by learning to put aside our differences & make compromises for the sake of common good. We should honor their hard work & courageous efforts to open up the Church & welcome more Gentiles like us to the Christian community by searching for new ways to invite nonbelievers to be Christians. If we are able to do that, we will keep the sacrifices of the early Church more meaningful & the saving mission of Jesus more alive until His return.