



THE HOLY SPIRIT - THE GUIDING LIGHT OF THE CHURCH!

We often feel a deep sense of satisfaction if we have had the opportunity to find some authority to support our position when we were involved in a dispute. There is something really satisfying in knowing that we are right and we can prove our opponent wrong. There is that wonderful sense of "I got ya." And if we happen to be on the losing side, there is that horrible feeling of "being had." We might even try to finagle our way out so that it looks like we really won-or at least didn't lose so badly. How deeply human is the desire to win, to down our opponent. And often the truth is the real casualty in such situations.

When Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, to "teach you everything" and to "remind you of all that I have told you," he was not promising us a hammer with which to beat our opponents into the ground. The Holy Spirit was not sent by Jesus to help us win by destroying our enemies, but to have the wisdom to win them over to the real Truth-Jesus-in love.

In today's first reading Luke tells us of a serious controversy in the early church. The first people to accept Jesus were Jews and they followed the Mosaic law even though they were now Christians. They carried over into their new faith the practice of circumcision and viewed it as necessary for salvation. So, if you were going to convert to this new faith, you had to be circumcised. The non-Jewish converts to Christianity, the gentiles, saw things differently. They were not accustomed to the tradition of circumcision and so they did not see it as essential to living the faith. And, in Luke's words, "there arose no little dissension and debate." In other words, the church was seriously split over this issue and each side was condemning the other as wrong.

Today the church repeats the same situation even though the issues may be different. Few of us get irate over whether or not new converts are circumcised. But we do condemn each other on other issues: Camp A condemns camp B for being soft on abortion while camp C condemns camp D for not taking seriously the church's teachings on social justice. The right condemns the left for being liberal and the left condemns the right for being conservative.

Jesus said that he would send the Spirit to remind us of what he had taught us. Jesus taught forgiveness and reconciliation. About the only thing that made him angry was hypocrisy and self-righteousness because these preclude forgiveness and reconciliation. Jesus came to forgive, not to condemn. He came to call sinners, not the self-righteous. Where and when did Christianity turn the gospel message of peace into a sword of condemnation?

The early church turned to the apostles for guidance. Firmly believing that the Holy Spirit dwells and works within the Christian community, the early church turned to the leaders of the church for help. James, as the head of the church in Jerusalem, spoke in the name of the apostles and voiced the solution---the gentiles are saved through faith in Jesus Christ but they did have to avoid any practice that is not compatible with their new faith. The solution was a compromise that helped the early Christians begin to purify their self-identity.

Looking to the teachings of our faith and to the gospel is our present-day way of allowing the Holy Spirit to teach us all that Jesus said and did. We, too, need to turn to the authorities in our church not to find an answer so that we can beat down our enemies, but to find the Holy Spirit's answer that will bring about peace and reconciliation. Like the early church we need to move beyond our view of what makes a good Catholic and allow the Holy Spirit to make us more loving of those who have a different opinion at times.



The Holy Spirit, sent by the Father in Jesus' name, will teach us everything...John 14:23-29 or John 17:20-26