

50 HOMILIES FROM THE HERMITAGE

50: URBI & ORBI

Pentecost completes Easter with the 50 'perfect days' 7x7 days

In this final trilogy of the early Church there will not be another list of names and places. By the time of the accounts of the early Church in the Acts of the Apostles the Church, Christian community, had reached the widest parts of the known world and had reached a centre in Rome. Hence on major Feasts the Pope gives his blessing to 'urbi et orbi'— 'to the city and to the world'. The story of Christ's Community carried an amazing journey. From a comparatively minor part of the Roman Empire the Church had moved throughout much of the known world to the metropolis of Rome. But the important matter is not that they had globe-trotted but that they were enabled Christ to carry His Proclamation of the Kingdom to everybody, as He had instructed. This final trilogy marks the transforming possibility. The first Gentile converts were either few or suspect. The centre of the Kingdom was the Jewish core of the disciples firstly in Jerusalem. There was not a problem when other Jewish communities joined, although there were squabbles about things. When first non-Jewish people wished to join, firstly notably by Cornelius and family, many found this suspect and even abhorrent. Then when disciples, notably Paul and Barnabas, found large number of Gentiles this came an issue which proacted the first Council of the Church and formed permanently the Mission to the world.

The Council of Jerusalem met in 48 AD (possibly 50 AD) and the issue was fundamental to the universal of the mission given by Jesus 'to all nations'. The issue was whether Christianity should be retained within the framework of the Jewish religion, laws and traditions or whether these should no longer apply given that crowds from many nations were accepting Christ and the Gospel. The constraints of the Jewish laws and outlook would not have been acceptable to wider nations and customs: many Jewish Christians felt, however, that since the Church had been formed from within the Jewish tradition, these treasured values should be retained. After much discussion it seems that James made the ruling that the Gentiles should not be required to follow the Jewish religion.

For over centuries many changes and developments in the Church have happened, and many of these have been controversial. In these issues some felt that we should retain the security of tradition and not risk the unknown: others believed that we need to move as needs arrive. Many Councils of the Church have reaffirmed current traditions: others have moved things ahead: any every case the Councils affirmed the truth of the Church in the opposition of apparently easier teaching, We have the chance to look forward to the ongoing Church as the lockdown ebbs. (In Liverpool we have the chance of moving forward through the work of the Synod). The future must retain the already established truths of the Christian faith. But we should not be afraid to accept change if it is the work of the Holy Spirit. It was the Spirit who brought to birth the Church on the first Pentecost and has inspired the members of the Council of Jerusalem enabling them to made a difficult decision. Despite the pandemic, the trouble around the Church, the manifestly materialist world challenging the Church, we should move forward and make the chance of enabling once again the mission of Jesus 'to bring the Gospel to all nations'.

(The Council of Nicea (325 AD) reaffirmed the Divinity of Christ in the face of the opposition of the 'easier' option of Arius, who denied Jesus' Divinity and thereby hoped to solve the problem of Jesus having two natures. Arianism was possibly the most dangerous heresy in the years of the Church, and is still around today!). Councils of Ephesus and Constantinople dealt with many tricky theological issues. Lateran IV (1215) under the (perhaps too powerful) Pope Innocent brought many reforms which had needed and which had been budding under Leo IX and Gregory VII (Hildebrand): many still apply today. Trent affirmed the traditions of the Church in the face of the Reformation and also managed to remove many of the abuses which had flourished in the Renaissance. Vatican II has tried to bring the Church into the modern world of the late 20th century.

CODA: This 50th Homily befits the Feast of Pentecost this weekend: Pentecost celebrates the Feast of 7x7 days and weeks—50 a perfect number. As we (hopefully) climb out of the period of lockdown, may we be positive in the Church and in the world, shunning greed, egotism and the illusion that we can and should be self-sufficient. Perhaps it is the time to conclude these 'homilies from the hermitage' Shortly the door should open and we fly like (sometimes rather podgy) birds. These 'homilies' were offered to support in the 'lockdown times'. They have now worked through the cycles of the Church's year. Maybe it is time to stop and perhaps ahead provide different items: 'snippets from the wastepaper basket! I should value any of you have a view about this and whether this issue should close the set with the option of different topics later.

WISHING EVERY BLESSING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT AT PENTECOST TO ALL.

Boniface