

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Apr 27th 2016

The first reading for today is an account of an early debate among the first followers of Christ. The believers were rejoicing at the numbers of gentiles who had decided to join, i.e., to believe with them that Jesus was, indeed, the Messiah, the Son of God. Since the first followers of Jesus were Jewish, they had always scrupulously followed Mosaic Law. One of the tenets of the Jewish faith was practiced since the time of Abraham; males were to be circumcised. This was a problem, since the gentiles were not circumcised. The Pharisees among those who followed the teachings of Jesus said that the new converts must be circumcised to be true members of the faith. The response from the Apostles and Elders essentially was (as it often is today): “We will have a meeting about this.” It was eventually decided that the gentiles could be truly part of those who believed in Jesus based on their faith in Him. Circumcision was, in fact, not the most important factor that determined whether a person was a Christian. This was a very important realization for the early church members. Would the community be made up only of faithful Jews who believed in the divinity of Jesus, or would anyone be included who believed that Jesus is the Son of God? The meetings among the brethren ultimately allowed the uncircumcised gentiles to be included. The difference between Jews and gentiles would be based not on a physical trait, but rather, on one’s faith in Jesus.

The believers have, of course, continued to debate many issues; we have, in fact, never stopped the dialog. It is certain that we must continue to love and understand each other as the conversation progresses. Love is the common denominator that allows us to overcome and to learn from our differences.

Jesus reminds us through today’s gospel that we are branches of the vine. The core of the gospel had already been taught to the followers of Jesus by their everyday experience with vineyards. They all knew that the vine is necessary for the branches to live. They also knew that vineyards needed to be regularly tended to; they needed to be pruned to be productive. If the vine was healthy, the branches would, in turn, bear more fruit and that would allow further propagation of the parent plant. Jesus stated that we cannot do anything without Him. He is the vine and we are the branches. He tells us: “Remain in me, as I remain in you.” Glorify the Father by bearing much fruit and becoming His disciples. The underlying message may be that it is not enough to be supported by the vine, but that we also need to carry out God’s plan for us in order to be productive. Above all, it comes down to this: we need to love God and one another to the best of our ability. Live by and spread Jesus’ words.

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