

“The Father is Greater than I” (6th Sunday of Easter, Year C)

Acts 15:1-2, 22-29—The Council of Jerusalem

1. Circumcision: Is it necessary to “be saved” (15:1)?
2. Antioch: center of the circumcision controversy; Paul and Silas sent (15:22)
3. Council of Jerusalem: commands (cf. Noahide laws; Tosefta, *Abodah Zerah* 8:4-6)
 - a. Food sacrificed to idols Idolatry (Lev 17:7-9)
 - b. Blood Consumption of blood (Lev 17:10-13)
 - c. What is strangled Improperly slaughtered (Lev 17:15-16)
 - d. Unchastity (Greek *porneia*) Incestuous Relationships (Lev 18:6-30)

Psalm 67—Let All the Nations Praise You!

1. Gentiles: “Let the peoples praise thee, O God!” (v. 3)

Rev 21:10-14, 22-23—The New Jerusalem

1. New Jerusalem: comes down “out of heaven” (21:10); no temple! (21:22)

John 14:23-29—The Paraclete and the Greatness of the Father

1. New Temple: the “Father” and Jesus “make our home with him” (14:23)
2. Paraclete (Greek *paraklētos*) = “will teach you all things” (14:26)
 - a. “Counselor” (RSV) (cf. John 14:26)
 - b. “Advocate” (NAB) (cf. 1 John 2:1)
 - c. “Comforter” (KJV) (cf. John 14:26-27; Matt 5:4)
3. Peace: “peace I leave with you; my peace I give you” (14:27; Last Supper)
4. The Father: “is greater than I” (14:28)?

The Living Tradition: All Foods are “Clean”

Council of Florence (15th Ecumenical Council): “[The holy Roman Church] firmly believes, professes, and teaches that... *“not what goes into the mouth defiles a person,”* [Matt 15:11], and because the difference in the Mosaic law between clean and unclean foods belongs to ceremonial practices, which have passed away and lost their efficacy with the coming of the gospel. *It also declares that the apostolic prohibition, to abstain “from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled” [Acts 15:29] was suited to that time when a single church was rising from Jews and Gentiles, who previously lived with different ceremonies and customs.* This was so that the gentiles should have some observances in common with Jews, and occasion would be offered of coming together in one worship and faith of God, and a cause of dissension might be removed, since by ancient custom blood and strangled things seemed abominable to Jews, and gentiles could be thought to be returning to idolatry if they ate sacrificial food... [However,] *since the cause of that apostolic prohibition has ceased, so its effect has ceased.* It condemns, then, no kind of food that human society accepts and

nobody at all, neither man nor woman, should make a distinction between animals, no matter how they died. (Council of Florence, Session 11, 4 February, A.D. 1442; trans. N. Tanner)

The Living Tradition: The Father is “Greater” than Jesus in his Human Nature

They [the heretics] say, for instance, that the Son is less than the Father, because it is written that the Lord Himself said, “My Father is greater than I.” (John 14:28)... And not, therefore, without cause the Scripture says both the one and the other, both that the Son is equal to the Father, and that the Father is greater than the Son. *For there is no confusion when the former is understood as on account of the form of God, and the latter as on account of the form of a servant.* And, in truth, this rule for clearing the question through all the sacred Scriptures is set forth in one chapter of an epistle of the Apostle Paul, where this distinction is commended to us plainly enough. For he says, “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be *equal with God*; but *emptied Himself*, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and was found in fashion as a man.” (Phil 2:6-7). The Son of God, then, is equal to God the Father in nature, but less in “fashion.” *For in the form of a servant which He took He is less than the Father; but in the form of God, in which also He was before He took the form of a servant, He is equal to the Father.* (Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 1.7.14; trans. NPNF)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (6th Sunday of Easter, Year C)

1. Why do so many contemporary Christians eat meat with blood in it, when the Council of Jerusalem forbid the consumption of “blood” for Christians at Antioch (Acts 15:29)?

2. What is the meaning of the title “Paraclete” in John 14? How does this word impact your understanding of who the Holy Spirit is?

3. According to Augustine, what does Jesus mean when he says that “the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28)?

For Further Study

1. Joel C. Elowsky, *John* (2 vols.; Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament IV; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 2.147-58.
2. Norman P. Tanner, S.J., ed. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (2 vols.; Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 1:577