

The Sixth Sunday of Easter
(Year C)

<i>First Reading</i>	Acts 15:1-2, 22-29
<i>Response</i>	O God, let all the nations praise you!
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8
<i>Second Reading</i>	Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	Whoever loves me will keep my word, says the Lord, and my Father will love him and we will come to him.
<i>Gospel</i>	John 14:23-29

The 6th Sunday of Easter for Year C (in a sense) brings us to the climax of our journey through the Gospel of John and through the sayings of Jesus to his disciples during the Last Supper discourse. And so, every year at Easter that's what we do, we hear the words of Jesus in the Good Shepherd discourse, we look at his resurrection appearances, and then we hear his teachings to the disciples on the night before he was crucified, especially from the Gospel of John). And the same thing's true today, we're going to look at John 14:23-29; a very important, very significant passage for the doctrine of (and the revelation of) the Holy Spirit and, with that, the doctrine of the Trinity (of the triune God), which, as I've said before (but I'm going to say again), according to the Catechism, is the central mystery of the Christian faith. A lot of times people would say, "Oh, the incarnation, that's the central mystery" or "the Eucharist is the central mystery." Not according to the Catechism. According to the Catechism, the central mystery of the Christian faith is the mystery of the Trinity, because it's the mystery of who God is in himself. And Jesus reveals that mystery in a profound way today during his words at the Last Supper in the Gospel of John. So let's look at John 14:23-29:

Jesus answered him, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. "These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I

leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you may believe.¹

Okay, so there's obviously a lot going on here, but we'll highlight a few elements. The first one that really demands our attention is the image of the Father and the Son coming and making their home with whoever keeps Jesus' word and loves him. Now, the image of "dwelling in a person" is an image that we'll frequently associate with the Holy Spirit. So if you think about the letters of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 6 (he also does this elsewhere in his letters to the Corinthians), he says "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, which you have from God?" So the idea of the spirit of God dwelling within us (as if in a temple) is a pretty common idea that we'll use for the Holy Spirit. But what I don't think is as common or is as frequent, is the image Jesus is using here. Namely, that if we love him and we keep his word (in other words, if we are one of his disciples), not only will the Holy Spirit dwell within us (he doesn't say anything about that just yet), what he says is, "I and my Father will love him, and come to him and make our home with him." So the image here is of the indwelling of Jesus (the Son) and of the Father in anyone who believes in him. So it's a temple image, but it's kind of an unusual one, that the Father and the Son will come and make their dwelling (or make their home) within us.

This should call to mind, earlier in the Gospel of John, the image of "the word who became flesh" and dwelt among us. The Greek there is literally "he 'tabernacled' among us", "he pitched his tent among us", "he dwelt with us". The same imagery is being used here, well not the exact same terminology, but the image of the Father and the Son coming and making their home with he who believes in Jesus. By contrast, "anyone who does not keep his word and does not love me" is not (obviously) going to be the dwelling place of the Father. And he says, "the word that you hear isn't mine but the Father's who sent me". So this is another important point. Although the Father and the Son are distinct persons, Jesus is very clear in

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

the Gospel of John that everything that the Son does and everything the Son says is ultimately from the Father. As he says elsewhere in the gospel, “the Son only does what he sees the Father doing.” And in this case, what he says is, “the words that I’m speaking to you, ultimately, they’re not mine, but they’re from the Father who sent me”. So you see this distinction of persons (the Son and the Father), but also a unity of Jesus’ actions and also of his words.

Now, he shifts. The next element that’s interesting here is that he begins to talk about the fact that he’s going to depart from the disciples. He’s going to leave them. And he’s referring here to (of course) his passion, and his death, and then (of course) his resurrection and his ascension. So he says to them, “I’ve said these things to you while I’m still with you, but the Counselor (the Holy Spirit) whom the Father will send in my name, is going to teach you everything and bring to remembrance everything that I’ve said to you.” Now pause there. Although on other occasions in the gospels, the Holy Spirit is mentioned — so for example, in the accounts of Jesus’ baptism, John the Baptist says “I baptize you with water, but one who is coming after me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” So the notion of “the Holy Spirit of God” is a Jewish concept, it’s a biblical concept; it goes back all the way to the book of Genesis in which the spirit of God (chapter 1) is hovering about the face of the waters, the face of the deep. And it can be used in all kinds of different ways to refer to the power of God, the workings of God in the world through his spirit (the Holy Spirit). That means the spirit that is set apart; that’s what holy means.

But in this case Jesus adds a title to the Holy Spirit, which is unprecedented. You don’t find it anywhere in the Old Testament or before the ministry of Jesus. He refers to the Holy Spirit as the *paraclete*; in the Greek, *paraklētos*. And you’ll see sometimes older translations will just transliterate that word (*paraklētos*) as *paraclete*. Most modern English versions will try to not just transliterate it, but translate it (because we don’t have a word *paraclete* in English). It kind of sounds like “parakeet”. So you’ve got to be a little careful when you’re using that term, that you explain exactly what you mean, what you’re saying. So some different translations of this word *paraklētos* are “counselor” (that’s the Revised Standard Version), and this puts the emphasis on the idea that the spirit is going to teach and to guide the disciples. That’s certainly a meaning right here in the context, because what does Jesus say? He’s going to teach you all things, and he’s going to call to mind everything I’ve said to you. So you can translate it as the Holy Spirit, the Counselor. Another translation is the Holy Spirit, the Advocate. And this one, actually,

you'll see not in the gospel of John, but in the 1st letter of John, which we don't read for today (but I'll at least, I'll still quote it for you). In 1st John 2:1, it says this:

My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate [in Greek, *paraklētos*; a *paraclete*] with the Father, Jesus Christ...

So notice, elsewhere in the letters of John, he uses the word *paraclete* not to refer to the Holy Spirit but to refer to Jesus Christ himself. And in this case it means "advocate". And that's actually from the Latin term, *advocatus* (*ad* means "to", *vo-catus* is "to call"). So a *paraclete* is somebody you "call to your side". An advocate is somebody you call to your side, like in a legal setting. A defense attorney is your advocate. You call him to your side to speak on your behalf. And so the word *paraclete* can also mean advocate, somebody who speaks on your behalf. And that's how it's used in that letter of John. We don't see that connotation in this immediate context of the gospel today, but it's another dimension of the Holy Spirit's role, to come to the defense (so-to-speak) of the flock of Christ, of the children of God, of the disciples of Jesus. But then finally, the word can be also translated as the comforter. And this is the Old English translation we find in the King James Version. "I will send the Comforter (the Holy Spirit) to you". And that is a meaning of the term. Again, in context, we can already see that because what is Jesus saying? "Let not your hearts be troubled. Let them not be afraid." So as the apostles are on the cusp of Jesus' passion, they begin to get scared. They begin to get afraid. And what Jesus is saying is the *paraclete* is going to come and be your comforter. He's going to console you in the midst of trial and tribulation. And actually, the same word is used in the beatitude, where he says, "blessed are those who mourn, they shall be comforted." The same Greek word there is the root, "they will be comforted", it's the word we get *paraclete* from, the verb there. That is in Matthew 5:4

So students sometimes will ask me, "What does *paraclete* mean? Does it mean 'advocate' or does it mean 'counselor' or does it mean 'comforter'?" And the answer is "Yes". It means all those things, and the way you determine the meaning of this very rich Greek word is the context. So, all three of those dimensions (comforting, counseling, teaching, advocating – I know those are four actually, but), that's what the Holy Spirit does. That's so-to-speak "who he is" in the drama of salvation, he's playing all those various roles and so Jesus is telling the disciples, "don't be afraid, don't be troubled, I'm going to send another advocate." Jesus is

the first *paraclete*, he's our first advocate, consoler, counselor, teacher, comforter; but he's sending another advocate (actually, the Father sends the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus) to be with the disciples. And this is significant, you see Jesus revealing for the first time...the Last Supper is really the first time where he reveals the mystery of the Trinity and he begins to speak of all three persons in one discourse. So we've seen him talk about the Father and himself elsewhere, we've seen him talk about the spirit on certain occasions, and he talks about himself as "Son" and "Son of Man" all the time); but here in John 14, in this key passage, he reveals the Father, the Son and the *paraclete*; the mystery of the triune God; the mystery of the Trinity.

And I can't help but make a connection here (I'm kind of getting ahead of myself) to the liturgy. I don't know if you've ever noticed this, but in the Mass, when we enter into the liturgy of Eucharist, the words of Jesus that the priest says at the mass (the words of institution) aren't the only words of Jesus taken from the Last Supper. So he says "this is my body, this is my blood", those are words of institution, they're from the Last Supper. But there's another statement from the priest that comes from the Last Supper, not in the synoptic gospels, but in the Gospel of John. It's when he says, "My peace I leave with you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you." I think that actually blows by us a lot of times. We don't realize (at least, I didn't realize for a long time), that that was another quote from Jesus from the Last Supper. But in this case, it's not the gift of his body and blood in the Eucharist, as much as it is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

So what's the peace that he's going to give to the disciples? What's the peace that he's going to leave with the disciples? On one level, it's going to be the spirit of peace who will come to the disciples in the midst of their fear, in the midst of their trials, and give them a peace that surpasses understanding. And as we'll see later in the gospel, will give them the power to forgive and to retain sins, and then ultimately in the Acts of the Apostles, the power to evangelize, to go out and to preach the gospel. So for me at least, it's always a special moment in the mass to remember that at every mass, because The trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) always act in unison with one another. They don't act separately from one another. There are distinctions between them, but they always act together in the economy of salvation. In the Eucharist, it's not just the 2nd person of the Trinity who is coming to us in his body, blood, soul and divinity, under the appearance of bread and wine. It's really crucial to remember that when the priest says the epiclesis, when he calls down the

spirit upon the elements to change the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, the third person of the Trinity is also coming, so-to-speak, into our midst.

It's beautiful that in the liturgy, traditionally, the bells would be rung at the consecration, but also at the epiclesis (when the priest calls the Holy Spirit). They kind of signal the coming of both the second and the third persons of the Trinity into our midst. The Mass is a Trinitarian event. It's not just Christ coming among us.

Whenever the Father sends the Son and wherever he sends the Son, the spirit always goes with the Son. So this is a beautiful passage here, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you. Not as the world gives I give to you. Don't let your heart be troubled." And he's going to go away but when he comes again, they're going to rejoice.

Now, the final element of this gospel text that I want to hit is one of the most controversial and I think one that makes faithful Christians, faithful Catholics, kind of scratch their heads. Because if Jesus says at the end, "If you loved me you would've rejoiced because I'm going to the Father." If you really loved me, you'd actually take joy in the Pascal Mystery because you would know that through the cross, I will then be raised and through the resurrection I will ascend and I will return to the Father. And then he says these words: "For the Father is greater than I." Now, alright, what does that mean? Have you ever wondered that? I thought Jesus was God. Isn't he fully divine? Isn't he God from God, light from light, true God from true God? I mean, that's what we confess in the Creed. And the foundation, one of the foundations of Christianity is the confession of Jesus' divine Sonship. That he isn't just a man, but that he is God made flesh. Especially in the Gospel of John, it's the Gospel of John who says, "And the beginning was the word, the word was with God, the word was God, and the word became flesh and dwelt among us." No gospel seems to reveal the mystery of Jesus' divine identity more clearly than the Gospel of John. And yet it's in the Gospel of John (and not in the other gospels) that we find Jesus say "the Father is greater than I." So, throughout the centuries, heretics, various people who had erroneous views of Jesus, have latched on to this verse to argue that Jesus isn't divine or that he isn't fully God, or that he's somehow "less than the Father"; that he's "subordinate" to the Father. You'll sometimes see that terminology used. And so, what do we say as Catholics to that? How do we interpret the verse?

Well the answer to that's real simple. We just ignore it. We don't talk about it. We don't preach about it. We just pretend like it's not there. No, okay, that's wrong.

That's not what we do. The Church canonized the scriptures. This is not a surprise to us, that Jesus says, "The Father is greater than I" in the Gospel of John. The Church gave us the Gospel of John and said this is the word of God. So the question becomes not "what do we do with the verse?" (in the sense of, "do we take it out of the Bible" or "do we ignore it"), the question becomes, "what does it mean? How do we understand this verse in context (in the context of the whole gospel)." And I'm going to come back to the living tradition in just a second, and we'll look at how this verse was interpreted by St. Augustine, but for now I would just make this one clear point: in its broader context, this verse cannot mean that Jesus is denying his divinity, because the whole Gospel of John is structured around revealing the fullness of Jesus' divinity. So the Gospel of John begins by saying "the word was with God and the word was God." The first line says that the word who became flesh is God. There's both a distinction (there's the word and there's God), but there's also equality, he was God. And if you fast forward to the end of the gospel (or, almost the end), how does it climax? With Thomas (the disciple) saying, "My lord and my God." And Jesus does not say, "Woah, woah Thomas, you've got it all wrong here. I'm just a man." If Jesus had said in that context, "No, Thomas, the Father is greater than I", then you might think "Okay, well, there's got to be some difference here. He's denying his divinity." But that's not the case, Jesus accepts the worship due to God alone that Thomas gives him in John 20. And then, of course, there are all kinds of passages throughout the gospel, like John 10:30, "I and the Father are one", Where the Jews pick up stones and they're going to kill Jesus because "he, although a man, is making himself God."

So, the fullness of Jesus' divinity is really unquestionable in the Gospel of John. So the question becomes, well what does he mean in this verse, by saying, 'The Father is greater than I'? Well the answer is really simple, although, it takes some pondering to understand fully. The answer is simple. As Catholics, you have to remember, in the Gospel of John, Jesus isn't just fully God, he's also fully man. He's fully human. And in the context of his Last Supper discourse, what is Jesus focusing on here? Is he focusing on the mystery of his divinity? Or is he focusing on his humanity, that is about to be crucified, that is about to die, and that is to be raised and then do what? Ascend to the Father. "I'm going to go to the Father." So in context here, the emphasis is on his human nature, his human body, which is going to be crucified, it's going to be put to death, and it's going to rise again, and then here's the great mystery of the ascension: something unprecedented will take place. Namely, that a human body, which is finite and limited (it only takes up one place), which has flesh and bone and takes up matter and space, that limited human body

is going to be glorified and is going to enter into the life of the Trinity. It's going to return to the Father.

That's something that's never happened before. So in terms of the mystery of the Trinity, from all eternity, as John says at the beginning of his gospel: "There was the word. There was the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are the eternal God, the triune God." But Father, Son and Spirit are all pure spirit, right? They're not bodies. They don't have limitations of space and time. They are the eternal triune God. But when the second person of the Trinity takes on a human nature, when the word becomes flesh, as John says at the beginning of the gospel, one of those persons of the Trinity assumes a finite, limited, human nature. This means he has a body, he has a soul, a human mind, a human will, everything that there is about being human (which by definition is being limited) is assumed except for sin. So in context here, what Jesus is speaking about is not his divine nature, but his human nature, his human body, which is less than the Father. The Father is omnipotent, omnipresent (he's present everywhere, that's what omnipresent means). But in his humanity, is the Son omnipresent? Well, no. He's omnipresent in spirit, but not in his body; his body is limited.

So the Father here is greater than Christ in the sense of Christ's humanity (his limited human nature). And so what he's telling the disciples is, if you understood this, you would actually rejoice because my human nature is going to be put to death. My human body will die and it will be raised again and then I will return to the Father. You should rejoice at that, because before the ascension of Jesus, there is no human being (no human nature) that has been brought into the life of the triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). That union of God and humanity is something that takes place through the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ. It's the entry of Jesus into the life of the Trinity, not just in his divine nature, which has always been the case; he's always been united with the Father and the Spirit for all eternity in his divine nature, but something new is taking place in the human nature that he's assumed in the incarnation.

Now, I guess that maybe doesn't pass...I said earlier that it's really simple, so maybe it's not really simple. It is a mystery. But what I mean is that it's clear when you look at what Jesus' words are...it's clear what he doesn't mean in context. He's not denying his divinity, he talking about his humanity. And whenever you look at the words of Jesus in the gospels, always remember, although we don't separate them, it's important to distinguish between...sometimes he will be talking

about his divine nature and other times he'll be talking about his human nature. And it's always crucial to kind of ask yourself, which of those is he focusing on? Because there is a distinction between the two that's important to keep in mind. He's not saying the Father's greater than him, with reference to his divine nature, but the Father is greater than him with reference to his humanity, to his human nature, which is the focus of these words.

Okay, let's do something a little easier. Let's go to the Acts of the Apostles and talk about why we can eat crawfish. This one is actually somewhat more earthy (so to speak). In Acts 15:1-2, the 1st reading for this week continues our journey through the life of the early Church, the first decades of Christianity, and it brings us to the famous Council of Jerusalem. Acts 15:1-2, 22-29. You'll probably remember this story from elsewhere, but once Peter and Paul begin bringing the gospel to the Jews and the Gentiles, one of the questions that emerged was, well, wait, God told the Israelites in the Old Testament that they had to be circumcised in order to be part of the covenant, so do Gentiles have to be circumcised to be saved? And in order to settle the question, the early Church did what the Church has done since then, called an apostolic council to decide the question in a definitive way. And this is what the scripture says:

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.

Pause there. Notice, how do they settle a debate? They don't just sling Bible verses at one another, although I'm sure they quoted the scriptures in their debate. The way to settle the question was to bring it to the Apostles, because they had the authority given to them from Jesus. So if you fast forward down to verse 22 and following, the lectionary there basically gives us the summary of the results of the council:

Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsab'bas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, with the following letter: "The brethren, both the apostles and the elders, to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cili'cia, greeting. Since we have heard that some persons

from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, it has seemed good to us in assembly to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

Okay. What’s going on here? So basically, what had happened in the church of Antioch is there was a debate between the Jews and the Gentile believers about whether you had to be circumcised to be saved and whether you had to keep all the laws of Moses in the Old Testament. If you recall, traditionally there are 613 commandments attributed to Moses in the first five books that would involve all kinds of things like: you can’t eat shellfish, you can’t eat pork, you can’t eat meat with the blood in the meat, as well as other various laws. And so this was causing a conflict in the early church. The council of Jerusalem decided two things. First, that circumcision was unnecessary for salvation. That part of the council decree is actually skipped by the lectionary today (it’s not focused on that). It’s focused on the second part of the council’s decree, the letter that was sent to the Church in Antioch, that said, although they don’t have to be circumcised, we command the Christians living in Antioch, and Syria, and Cili’cia to follow these rules: don’t eat food sacrificed to idols, don’t eat blood, don’t eat anything that’s been strangled, and avoid unchastity or *porneia* (sexual immorality is probably the best translation of that).

I can’t tell you how many times students have asked me this question. “Well, hold on Dr. Pitre. Is it okay for me to go to a steakhouse and eat a rare steak? I mean, it has blood in it, obviously, and here we have an apostolic constitution (an apostolic letter) declaring that the Christians were prohibited from eating blood. So why is it that Christians today don’t follow these aspects of the law of Moses?” The most obvious one being, not consuming blood. Okay, so how would we answer that? This is a really fascinating question. I completely sympathize with Christians who are just reading the Bible on their own and their trying to figure out, “well, wait. How do I follow this law? It seems pretty clear that the apostles here are commanding, through the Holy Spirit, that the Gentile believers in the churches, al-

though they don't have to be circumcised, they do have to abstain from strangled animals, blood, food sacrificed to idols and then unchastity. So why do Catholics seem to pick certain commandments to follow and not follow others? I mean, why aren't we keeping the laws of the Old Testament that said you couldn't have shellfish and you couldn't eat swine? And many secular critics of Christianity will actually say, "Look, you Christians are just picking and choosing. It's arbitrary. You pick whatever Old Testament laws you want to follow and then you discard the others." So, what do we make of that?

In this case, I'm just going to go straight to the authoritative interpretation of the scriptures that were given to us by the Council of Florence. This is the 15th ecumenical council of the Church. This is a great example of how when there is a text like this, which is admittedly ambiguous, it's understandable that some people would say "no, we have to keep following these rules." And other people might say, "Well, hold on. No, those rules aren't for everyone." As you'll see, the Church takes the position that these decrees of the Council of Jerusalem are no longer binding. Let me just read to you the reasons why. So, in terms of the living tradition of the Church, the Ecumenical Council of Florence (which was recognized by the Pope), has this to say about Acts 15. This is the definitive interpretation of this text by the Church:

[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.²

Okay, so what did the council just say? It made a distinction between certain decrees that are binding for all time, like the declaration that you don't have to be circumcised to be saved, and other decrees, which were pastoral provisions that were specific to that time and place, and which are no longer applicable to our situation. So, in other words, the Council of Jerusalem was dealing with specific churches in Antioch, Syria and Cili'cia, where there were mixed congregations of Jews and Gentiles. The Jewish believers were being offended by the Gentile believers who were eating meat with the blood in it (as they were used to) or going down to the local market and getting food that had been sacrificed to idols but was there on sale. That's how it worked in the 1st Century A.D. Much of the meat in the marketplace had already been dedicated in the pagan temple to the gods. Now Jews would never eat that kind of meat, but the Gentiles were accustomed to eating it. So what the apostles had to say was, in light of the offense and the scandal that's being caused to your Jewish neighbors who are coming to church with you to gather, and living next door to you, to abstain from eating meat with blood in it and from eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols, because it was offensive to them. So in other words, this part of the apostolic decree was never intended to be a universal decree for the whole church. You'll notice, they don't send the letter to all the churches throughout the world, they sent it to a specific set of churches that are dealing with this conflict between Jews and Gentiles. And so the Council of Florence here says that in keeping with the teaching of Jesus in the gospel, that it's not what goes into a person that defiles them, but what comes out (like in Mark 7, "thus he declared all foods clean"), so the Church definitively has interpreted Acts 15 as not being a universal law for all Christians to follow, but rather a specific law for the Christians who were living in Antioch, next to their Jewish neighbors, so as not to give scandal. That was the reason for that decree.

So, it's an excellent example of how we really do need the magisterium of the Church (the bishops and the Pope) to guide us in the interpretation of difficult passages like Acts 15. But, according to their definitive interpretation, which is under the authority of the apostles and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church has made clear that these provisions are no longer in force for Christians who are liv-

² Council of Florence, Session 11, 4 February, A.D. 1442; trans. N. Tanner

ing in areas where this kind of scandal is no longer an issue, in the predominantly Gentile church of the 15th Century, and then also down to today.

Now, in closing, I'll end with one last quote. We already looked at the question of how we interpret the Father being greater than Jesus, and I just want to make sure you're clear that what I said to you earlier isn't just my interpretation. This is how the text has been interpreted by great saints and doctors of the Church, most notably, St. Augustine. In his book, which we've quoted before, *On The Holy Trinity*, he has this to say about "the Father is greater than I":

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.*³

So notice what Augustine is saying. It's real simple. The reason Jesus both says he's equal to the Father and that the Father's greater than him is that they're both true. One is true with reference to his divine nature. He's equal to the Father. The other is true with reference to his humanity. In his humanity, he's less than the Father. The mystery of the incarnation is that both of those realities are true in the one person of Jesus Christ.

³ Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 1.7.14; trans. NPNF