

6 Easter C

May 22, 2022

St. Patrick

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Two verses before the first reading which we heard this Sunday, the Acts of the Apostles tells us this: **“Paul and Barnabas related...how God had opened the door of faith for the Gentiles”** (14:27).

**“...opened the door for the Gentiles.”** St. Patrick’s: For whom else ought the door be opened?

It was in the first years of the church, a mere fifteen years after Jesus’ resurrection. As Pope Francis put it in a homily on this passage in 2015, the early church found itself “holding a hot potato in their hands!” There was no social media back then, but a lot was said when the Acts of the Apostles tells us there was **“no small dissension and debate.”** It must have been a verbal free-for-all!

**“Paul and Barnabas related...how God had opened the door of faith for the Gentiles.”**

Yes, that renegade Apostle Paul started preaching to non-Jews, called Gentiles. If *they* believed that “Jesus is Lord,” and lived his “new way,” they could be baptized and become a full part of the church. The old guard, those of Jewish blood, became incensed, furious. The old guard said that those Gentiles could become part of the church if the males were all circumcised, and everybody kept *all* the Jewish laws. They couldn’t go to the Rendezvous for ribs any longer!

**“Paul and Barnabas related...how God had opened the door of faith for the Gentiles.”**

This new faction under Paul couldn’t argue, “Jesus told us to do so” (1). Oh, on that first Pentecost, all those filled with the Spirit were those of Jewish heritage. They would have laughed if some suggested that the door should be opened to those filthy, unruly Gentiles!

There was no fixed roadmap, no signposts on which direction to take, and whether it was okay to reach out to those Gentiles.

It almost split the church in half. This first controversy was all about...well, who *really* belongs. Should that door of faith be opened fully, or just a crack in it?

Shortly after Pope Francis began his ministry as Bishop of Rome, he preached on this passage in these words: **“There was a ‘No’ Church that said, ‘you cannot; no, no, you must not’ and a ‘Yes’ Church that said, ‘but...let’s think about it, let’s be open to this, the Spirit is opening the door to us”** (2).

With tremendous pushback, Paul challenged his fellow members to be a **“‘Yes Church.’”** And he won. Or rather, the Holy Spirit won. In the letter sent out to the Gentiles, the apostles put it like this, **“It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us, too...”** (Acts 15:28).

Friends: Aren’t we called to be **“A ‘yes’ Church”** in which the Spirit is opening the door? Especially when Jesus doesn’t give us a fixed roadmap, well—

+ Are we just giving a crack in the door to women in the church, and refusing to open the door fully to women?

+ We have to be aghast and horror-struck by the massacre a week ago in the Buffalo supermarket, as black persons were gunned down by a white supremacist. And yet, are we just opening a crack in the door to persons of color, and refusing to truly open the door to Black persons—in our nation, as well as within the Catholic Church?

+ And also: Seventeen years ago, our emeritus bishop, Bishop Terry Steib, wrote a letter to all Catholic households in our diocese about gay and lesbian persons, and entitled it *The Church as home to all people of God*. Are we really a **“‘Yes’ Church”** to LGBT persons, or barely cracking the door?

Pentecost is not a one-time event, some two thousand years ago. The feast is two weeks from now, but Pentecost is ongoing. May the Spirit truly blow open the door, that we can be a **“‘Yes’ Church!”** And let the church say...Amen!

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(1) As Raymond E. Brown explains in *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), pg. 308.

(2) Pope Francis' homily during daily Mass on May 2, 20

*General Intercessions*

*May 22, 2022*

*6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter*

**Lead us, the church, to discern your will as we craft our future as Jesus' disciples under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Inspire us to find quality time for leisure, prayer and reflection during the summer weeks; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Bless all graduates, leading them with hope into their future, and empowering them to use their gifts for the benefit of others; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Empower us to find constructive and nonviolent ways to end racism, bigotry and hatred; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Clothe your Church with power to heal the sick, comfort the troubled, and guide the young; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Shine your everlasting light on those who have died, especially those who died in the Buffalo supermarket massacre, and all who have died in the Ukraine war; we pray to you, O Lord—**