

**COMMENTARY ON READINGS FOR SUNDAY,
May 16, 2004 (Sixth Sunday of Easter)**

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We can look at this Sunday's readings as reflecting three different times in the life of the Church. The first reading from Acts reflects the time of the early Church, when it was debated whether the Gentile newcomers to the Christian faith had to first become Jews in order to be saved (as the Pharisees who had become Christians argued, Acts 15:5). The meeting which discussed this issue is known as the first ecumenical council, and it met in Jerusalem, the headquarters of Christianity at the time. A compromise solution is reached: the Gentiles Christians need not be circumcised, nor do they have to observe the Law of Moses. It is enough if they observe certain prescriptions mandated by Leviticus for Gentiles living among Jews; this would be the minimum required for harmonious relations between Jewish and Gentile Christians (especially important at meals). Eventually, of course, the Church became so preponderantly Gentile that even this compromise was unnecessary.

The second reading reflects another level, that of the End Time, symbolized by the New Jerusalem (Rev 3:12; 21:2), decked in the finest jewels as desired by Isa 54:11-17. The time of the Temple and its purity regulations (which the book of Leviticus was all about) is passed; Almighty God and the Lamb are the new Temple, that is, the divine and the human are in perfect unity and harmony (see Rev 21:1-3). Eternal light without darkness is a common image of End Time salvation (Isa 60:1-3; Zech 14:6-7; John 8:12; Eph 5:8 etc.).

Finally, the gospel reading is taken from Jesus' farewell speech to his disciples. Jesus is going back to his Father, from whom he came, but this will result in the sending of the Holy Spirit; in fact, the Holy Trinity will dwell in the disciple who keeps Jesus' words, which come from God (see also John 14:16-17, 20). What Jesus told his disciples then to comfort them as he was leaving this world is also a comfort to us as we await his return (see also John 14:1-3).