

Year C Sixth Sunday of Easter
Acts 15:1-2, 22-29; Ps 67; Rev 21:10-14, 22-23; Jn 14:23-29
by Emilio G. Chávez

Luke, in his two-part work Lk-Acts, is at pains to show continuity in salvation history, God's long-suffering patience and step-by-step movements in his dealings with his people. In the first reading, we get a glimpse of the early Church (many date this "Council of Jerusalem" to the year 49, that is, less than twenty years after Jesus' death) debating a controversial issue: must the first pagan converts to Christianity, in order to live and eat together with the until-then Jewish majority, be circumcised and otherwise embrace Judaism in all its requirements? Paul had angrily confronted Peter in Antioch about "fudging" on this issue, Gal 2. That is, observant Jews (the "James party") exerted pressure even on Peter and Barnabas to live like Jews and separate from Christian non-Jews, unless these adopted Jewish ways ("Judaized," Gal 2:14). The whole purpose of Judaism (which we must historically understand and theologically respect) was and is to separate Jew from pagan so as to ensure the holiness (=separateness, consecration, "devotedness") of the Jewish people for the true God. It is only *in Christ* that this dividing wall is abolished, Eph 2:11-22. Still, it required a "long debate," Acts 15:7, and the interventions of Peter and James, to resolve the tension with a compromise: pagan, Gentile converts need not observe the whole Mosaic Law (Torah), but only certain basics that they in any case already knew were absolutely non-negotiable in order to "break bread" with Jews: to avoid meat sacrificed to idols (most meat was thus sacrificially-slaughtered in the Greco-Roman world), consuming blood (Gen 9:4; Lev 3:17; 17:10-13), the meat of strangled animals, and *porneia*, which can refer, broadly, to sexual misconduct (the *porn-* root refers to prostitution), but which has the apparent, more specific meaning "unlawful marriage" in Mt 19:9.

In different ways, the second reading and the gospel speak about life in God's presence. In Rev, the image is of the holy city of Jerusalem, when it will fulfill its destiny as the place where God's presence shines forth like the light of creation in Gen 1:3-5 (see also Isa 60; Zech 14:6-11). In John's gospel, we not only dwell in Christ (as branches of the vine, Jn 15, and as Paul says), but Christ, and the whole Trinity, dwell in us (see also 1 Cor 3:16; 6:15-20). This was the basis of the spirituality of the Carmelite mystic Blessed Sœur Elizabeth of the Trinity.