

A reflection on today's Reading and Gospel. Acts 15-22 31. John 15: 12-17

How often, over the time of lockdown, have we heard argument and counter-argument about how best to save lives, kick-start the economy, allow people 'freedom' to interact as they see fit, and how to bring the awful pandemic to its end? What is the best way forward? How difficult for those in authority.

In the Readings this week we have heard arguments about a situation which might seem of far lesser significance. None the less, it is causing disunity amongst the newly established church in Antioch and elsewhere.

As a result, some members of the local community accompany Paul and Barnabas, to Jerusalem to seek guidance from the Apostles and elders there. In the discussions that follow, certain converts from the Pharisees' party are resistant to any change in their ancient traditions or to the law as passed down from Moses. Strong leadership is needed, and decisions are made. A delegation of committed and respected Brothers is sent back with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch with a letter of guidance. We hear how the community were, "Delighted with the encouragement it gave them."

Sometimes we are drawn to baulk against change or what we, as individuals or communities, believe to be right.

Decisions, some of them difficult, have had to be made by the Lord's Representative and his advisers ever since. The need to guide the Brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ, in the best interests of all, remains the same today.

True freedom can be achieved through Dialogue, understanding, and the courage to follow where the Spirit leads. Is not this Jesus' message in today's Gospel when he says, "Love one another as I have loved you?"

Jesus wants his friends (us) to believe in him and those to whom he has given authority. He wants them to achieve the friendship, closeness and understanding that is the product of Spirit – led dialogue, and to have the desire and willingness to spread his message of love to others.

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