

So, this week I wrote a letter to the bishop who ordained me, now retired, encouraging him in his ministry to the Little Sisters of the Poor outside Chicago.

On the other end of the clerical spectrum, I wrote our seminarian, Josh Barlett, encouraging him to do well on his upcoming finals at Conception Seminary.

And of course, since it is Mothers Day, I wrote my mom, encouraging her to continue being good to her children, especially the often neglected middle child.

How about you? Did you give some encouraging words to someone this past week for your heart exercise? If not, then *I* encourage you to do it sometime soon.

In the Acts of the Apostles today, we hear of a situation that had the potential to divide the early Church. The issue arose only after Paul and others began to work with Gentiles – that is those who were not Jewish and were unfamiliar with Jewish ways.

The issue can be stated in several ways: How much of the Jewish Law will the Gentiles have to keep? How much of its Jewish past will this new way of Christianity hold on to? What is the core set of beliefs of this new way that will set it apart?

At the heart of the issue was the question if Christianity was to remain a division of Judaism or become something completely separate. Not an issue with an easy solution.

And notice what did not happen when it came to settling the issue, on the one hand Paul *did not* go to Jerusalem demanding it has to be this way or else—“Let’s abandon Judaism all together and if I don’t get my way, I’m taking my people and splitting.”

And on the other hand, Peter and those in Jerusalem *did not* dig in their heels and say “We’ve always done it this way,” so we have to retain all our Jewish roots.

No what happened was they came together. They sat down. They talked. They negotiated. They worked out their differences. They compromised – so as to “not place on anyone a burden beyond a few necessities.”

I think there is a wisdom in that action that seems to be missing in our society and in the church today – as we so quickly draw lines in the sand – and establish our camps.

It’s only when we can sit down and talk and listen and come to an understanding of each other, rather than ignoring or dismissing each other that we can settle our differences.

And it's only when we can settle our differences instead of calling each other names and simply ignoring each other, that we can be at peace, not as the world gives it, but as Jesus gives it.

To do this would mean that we have to have a great reliance, not on ourselves, but on that Advocate Jesus talks about – the Holy Spirit.

For even in the midst of conflict and division it is Christ who can turn our minds to thoughts of peace.

It is the Holy Spirit who can then change hearts: to get enemies to speak to one another; to get those who are estranged to join hands in friendship – and who gets nations to seek the way of peace, together, as the preface to the second prayer of Reconciliation reminds us . . .

And remember, I'm not ready for bartending school yet – because I still need and believe in a church which claims in its document on the Church in the Modern World: that it can be a sign of such cooperation based on honest dialogue – which requires the fostering of mutual esteem, reverence, harmony and the full recognition of diversity.

So perhaps our heart exercise for this week can just be to identify those whom we have difficulty with or have already cut out of our lives --- because of an argument, disagreement or misunderstanding. And then simply see if we can still identify what that argument, disagreement or

misunderstanding was about. And then ask if it is really worth carrying the baggage of the pain and hurt around. Or if it is time to free ourselves from it, by sitting down and talking and listening and coming to an understanding of each other.

For the Holy Spirit is at work – when understanding puts an end to strife, when hatred is quenched by mercy and vengeance gives way to forgiveness.