

A little context for our first reading may be helpful. Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem because some people from Judea were saying that circumcision was necessary for salvation. Circumcision, of course, didn't just mean circumcision alone, but rather a shorthand expression for keeping the whole Mosaic Law – keeping the entire Jewish way of life.

It included keeping the sacrifices, dietary laws, ritual washings, laws pertaining to the Sabbath, etc. In Jerusalem, after much debate, Peter got up and settled the matter by saying we are saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus. In other words, one is not saved by circumcision and keeping Mosaic Law, but by faith in Christ.

It's interesting that when the letter with the decision from the Council said, "*It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities.*" Notice that it's not just the Apostles who made the decision, but rather the Holy Spirit and the Apostles. One of the core beliefs we have about the Church is that the Holy Spirit guides it.

Here is what the Catholic Catechism says about the Holy Spirit's role in the Church: "*What the soul is to the human body, the Holy Spirit is to the Body of Christ, which is the Church*" (CCC 797). In other words, just as the soul animates and directs the human body, so the Holy Spirit guides animates and directs the Church.

One of my favorite images for the Church is an icon of a boat with the apostles in it. Jesus is at the rudder of the boat. Of course, sometimes we think Jesus is sleeping, especially when storms come, but none-the-less, He's there. He's always in control.

The Holy Spirit, for His part, is the wind that moves the Church forward. He guides the Church to the port of heaven. One always wants to remain on board Peter's boat.

For our part, may we know that Jesus is always in control and the Holy Spirit guides the Church. Just as the Holy Spirit guided the Apostles through the Jerusalem Council (there was much debate at that council), so the Holy Spirit guides the Church now.

May we pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide the bishops as lead the Church, Jesus' boat, to the port of heaven.

See picture below...

