

The 5th Sunday of Easter -- May 10, 2020

We are surely going through a new experience in our life and world dealing with the coronavirus. Many are looking back in history to find lessons for our day from such events as the Spanish Flu, the Great Depression, WWI or WWII.

The Church herself has had and still continues to deal with crises in her own life. In more recent times we have been dealing with the scandal of sexual abuse by priests and also in general we have an equally serious crises of faith in which many have abandoned God and their faith communities.

As the Church deals with these crises it is blessed to be able to go back in history and to the Scriptures themselves to learn from the examples and experiences of its early years. For example -- the Book of the Acts of the Apostles tells the story of the first years of the Church. It starts off with a very unified community of Christians who shared a common language and Jewish heritage and traditions. However, as the community grew it became a diverse community with people of different languages and cultures. As we heard in today's first reading, this led to a conflict between the Hebrew members and the Greek-speaking or Hellenist members in regard to the neglect of the Hellenist widows and orphans.

At first everything had been handled by a handful of Hebrew leaders, but as the number of members grew it became too much for them alone. To resolve the matter the leaders invited input from the whole community – asking them to present to them the names of seven men who might take up this ministry to the needy. The community did this and interestingly, we see by the Greek names of all of them that the Church was willing to expand leadership and care of the community beyond the original Hebrew leadership.

In light of this we might ask how we and our world are **learning** in these days of dealing with the coronavirus and other issues of our day to include more and different persons in discernment and decision-making? For example, it was recently observed that women in

leadership seemed to be a little better at dealing with some crises than men. We also have seen how young people or the younger generations are blessing and helping the older generations to make full use of the technology and social media that have become so useful and even necessary these days. More and more we are recognizing the gifts and charisms for others that God has placed in those around us.

We might also ask how the Church and our world are allowing those whom they are trying to serve and help to have some input on what their needs are. For example, how are police allowing the neighborhoods they serve to be part of their decisions and planning? And as people are reflecting more deeply on the meaning of their faith, how might those moving back into church life be invited to express what their needs are? We need to maintain the truths and traditions of our faith but we need to ask for the grace to be open to greater diversity in the manner in which we respond to the spiritual needs of people today.

Most of us fear and try to avoid conflict. However, we need re-look at conflict and see that it is not a matter of finding out who is stronger, but having the courage to listen to each other and learn what the real needs are and then finding ways to address those needs together. Needs are needs – they are not right or wrong – and we have to find the most harmonious way and just way to address them.

In dealing with the coronavirus we are seeing different generations and groups more open to working together and this is good – for example – parents and teachers, young and old, faith groups and governments.

Though the Church became increasingly diverse as it grew, St. Peter, in the second reading, emphasizes that **all** are united in Christ the cornerstone. He uses the image of stones to help us see that while Christ is the stone rejected by the builders that has become the cornerstone, we must see that **each one of us too** are living stones necessary for the building of the Kingdom of God.

It was an even greater crises time for disciples of Jesus as they recognize that his conflicts with the religious leaders are leading up to his death. At the last supper, Jesus tries to comfort them and urges them to move from troubled hearts to believing in him. The belief that he desires in them is not in creeds, but a personal trust in him that is like the believing and trust that Jesus always showed towards his Father.

He reminds them of all his instructions and promises guidance for their future. He tells them that even though he is returning to the Father from whom he came, **they too** know the way to the Father because they know the Father and have seen the Father in him. While the disciples have all kinds of questions about him leaving them, Jesus' words to them are all about the deeper and continued **relationship** that he has with them and us. I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, he says. His identity is not of one who is apart from us but of one deeply with us and within us.

The disciples are confused when Jesus tells them that he is going to prepare a dwelling place for them. He tells them that if they know him, they also know the Father because He and the Father dwell in perfect union with each other. Therefore, if we have been drawn into Christ by baptism and are nourished in this union by the Eucharist, then we too know the Father and are already dwelling together in them. --- The Kingdom of God, it seems, is not so much a place as a **relationship** with the Trinity of God dwelling in us. The question is not **where** is this dwelling? -- but **who** is our way to dwelling in the Kingdom? --, and the answer is Jesus. He is our Way because he who was with the Father came to us and returned to the Father showing us the way to our heavenly home.

Whatever the situation we find ourselves in – no matter how different or difficult – we are to trust and follow him. The gospel message is one of hope and of how much we are cared for and loved.

Jesus seems to understand what a difficult message this was to believe. So, he says that if they cannot believe his words, we should look at his actions – the work he has done and is doing in our life. He says to us exactly

what he said to Thomas and Philip – “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” We know the way to the where he is going because we know him and we do not walk this path alone but as a community of faith.

As we saw in the first reading, the Spirit guided the early Church and continues to do so. What a blessing our faith communities have been in helping to show us the path and helping us to stay on it.

How can we now do this for others who may be troubled about where they are going? Who do we know who has a troubled heart, and how can we walk with them? How can we love them and give them new life as Jesus has loved us and given us new life and hope?