

## **The Power of Community**

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter (Year A)

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We tend to believe that power resides in the individuals at the top of a society or an institution- the leader, the president, the pope, the CEO, etc. We assume that these power-hungry individuals are the only ones who can make decisions and get things done. Everyone else is just a powerless victim of the system.

As individuals who are not at the top of society or other of our institutions, one of our temptations is to keep criticizing those ‘in power’ for the ways we feel that they abuse it, which may or may not be the case. The way forward is not to keep making ourselves out to be the victims, but to claim the power that we do have. The leaders may have formal power, but they don’t have all the power. There is power within the community. For our purposes as a Church, this is even more true. There is power within the Christian community.

At the end of today’s Gospel, Jesus makes a surprising remark. He says, “amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father.” This doesn’t make sense. Doesn’t Jesus have all the power? Wasn’t he God? How could we do works greater than his? The reason is because a community is always more powerful than any one individual. The most effective leaders, like Jesus himself, are the ones who can redistribute power more equally across the entire community. Instead of letting power be in the hands of a few individuals, they empower a wider circle of people to play a more active role in direction of their community.

St. Peter in our second reading today gives a good illustration of a healthy Christian community. In it, he says, “like living stones, let yourselves be built into

a spiritual house” with Christ as the cornerstone. Implied in this imagery is that everyone has a role to play. Even though stones don’t do much individually, together they can form a solid structure.

Moving from the individual level to the community level is hard, especially for us Americans. In her book *Transforming Communities*, Sandhya Rani Jha writes, “(I believe that [the] myth of individualism is one of the original sins of this nation, creating a lie that isolates us and leaves us either feeling like failures when we can’t achieve perfection on our own or making us believe that our successes are all our own instead of the result of a community carrying us.) As hard as constantly deepening our relationships can be, we know it is essential for us to building a community that provides for all people’s needs while nurturing all people’s gifts.” (142)

*There is power in the Christian Community whenever we have a common vision that allows everyone to contribute.*

In what ways does our Christian Community empower as many members as possible to participate and have a voice in the future of our parish?

Contrary to popular opinion, power is not always a bad thing. Whenever it is in the hands of a Christian community, that community can do even greater works than those of the savior himself.