

5th Sunday of Easter

As we move through the Sundays of Easter with their accompanying scripture readings, we get information of the steady growth of the early Church; of their activities and the accompaniment of the Holy Spirit. These are all human activities infused with the wisdom and strength of the Holy Spirit, as it guides the young Church. We follow them in time through our liturgical celebrations, and Jesus is with us in the Holy Spirit guiding us in the Church, and instructing us on what our faith in the Risen Lord should really mean in our lives, and how we are to respond to his love and concern for us.

Basically, Jesus teachings point to the fact though he cares for us individually, like he said in John 10:3 that he calls each one of us by name, yet it is his will that we be saved as a flock, as people, as a family. That is the purpose of his coming on earth, in order to bring into one fold all scattered children of God.

And we see this already happening in the early Church as we read the book of Acts of the Apostles and of the Holy Spirit. For this reason it is very important that we are aware of what we are, not only as Christians individually, but as necessary members of the Christian community to which we belong.

Through the readings of today, Jesus helps us to find the answer to the following questions: What is the Church? What are we in the Church or what is our position and mission in the Church? The early Christian community living in Jerusalem such as the one read to us today introduces us into these questions asked. These early converts to Christianity were of two groups comprising of Jews who spoke Greek because they were in Diaspora and those Jews who spoke only Aramaic, as well as others from pagan background who spoke only Greek. These generated a situation where there were two separate synagogues for worship, as well as other considerations of human weaknesses and limitations militating against unity. However, on listening to the preaching of the apostles after Pentecost, people from both groups joined the Church, thus the Christian faith and love brought them together as one.

One thing that stood very clear in that early Christian community was the fact that everyone, the apostles, the Christians of both groups, the seven deacons, all

had one thought in mind which was 'the good of the community'. In fact, they were all moved by the Holy Spirit and not by selfish interests.

As we continue to seek to know what the Church is, St. Peter in the second reading today compares the Church to a building and in this building, Jesus is the corner stone-a living foundation stone. A building in which each Christian is a living stone which ought to fit always more perfectly in the building which is the Church. Jesus, who is the corner stone, and living stone, the one who is life itself, communicates life to the whole building through the Holy Spirit. There is an essential difference between us and Christ. Jesus alone is all-Holy, and the foundation which he is, need not be improved upon, because he fits perfectly into the building. Unlike Christ, we Christians have the urgent and necessary task in life to go on polishing the stone that we are, so as to fit in always better in the Church to which we already belong. We must see to it that our stone fits perfectly by the time we die, since in the Church in heaven, all stones which do not fit into it will be discarded. Hence, Jesus said in John 12, that whoever rejects me and does not accept my words has something to judge him: And what is that? Jesus says it is the word I spoke that will condemn him on the last day. In the light of what I have said, Christians are not only living stones in the Church but also masons, they are people who are busy at all times at building it up. You will find a reference to that by St. Paul in 1Cor3:10-14.

A Christian a man or woman, therefore, is a person with double task in the Church: He or She must work every day at rendering more precious the stone which he himself is, so as to fit always more perfectly in the Church. Secondly, he must go on working hard at adding new stones to the building of the Church, while helping those already in the building to fit always more perfectly. It is also interesting to note that in this Temple which is the Church, every Christian is a 'priest'. This is because we all by virtue of our baptism and belonging to the same body are called to worship God together with Jesus Christ and with the Priests appointed by Him, especially when celebrating the Holy Eucharist. When we realize the great task that Jesus calls us to, we will readily give up selfish interests, patch up differences, as the Christian community in Jerusalem and Antioch did,

and consequently pay attention to what is important i.e. to grow in spiritual stature within the Church, both as individuals and as a community.

No one sheds further light on what the Church is as Jesus himself did. In his speech to his disciples, Jesus implies that the Church is a people on its way to the Father. And that he himself is the journey as well as the destination. Even as he goes to the father, he still comes repeatedly to make sure that everyone follows, to make sure that no one misses the way. And while he goes ahead of us, it is to see to it that everything is ready by the time we all arrive there-our true home. He gives a beautiful and breath-taking image in Rev.21:2-3 of what perfect finish the Church, his bride; the heavenly Jerusalem would look like on that day.

This and many more is the Church to which you and I belong. And indeed, it is a great pride, a great privilege, a great thing to belong to Christ Church.

Fr. Jude