

Fifth Sunday of Easter A/2008

We know that with the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and later the flight of many of his disciples following the persecution of the early Christians, the Church has extended all over the world. If the teaching of the apostles has contributed to the expansion of the word, the coming of new people into the Church, however, brought some problems as we heard in today's first reading. The Christians from Hellenistic background complained that the Hebrews were given a preferential treatment to the point that their widows got more attention and more goods than those of their group.

Since the situation ran the risk of becoming scandalous, the apostles held a meeting in order to organize the service and ministry inside the community for the benefit of all. That led to the appointment of seven men whose task was to care for the necessities of the community. In this sense, the apostles could devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.

From this text, we learn two things. First, the Church is made up of human beings and not of angels. In its long history, the Church has come to deal with problems caused by envy, jealousy, conflicts and misunderstandings among people of different cultural backgrounds. Instead of being scandalized or discouraged by such a situation, we have to take it as normal. In fact, such a situation reminds us of our sinfulness and our need to continually turn back to Jesus. The more we are close to Jesus, the greater will be unity among us.

The second thing we learn is that the Church is an organized community. When the apostles realized the risk of being consumed with numerous tasks at the expense of prayer and the preaching of the word, they discharged themselves of some of their authorities. Historically, this was the beginning of the diaconate ministry in the Church.

This distribution of ministries is important even today. It reminds us that we are differently gifted so that we might be at the service of one another for the consolidation of the body of Christ. We have to support each other and to work together, each according to his charisma, for the benefit of many inside the Church. The more we work together, the more we alleviate the burdens of one another, and especially of those whose task is prayer and the proclamation of the word.

By so doing, we will show that though we are many and different, we are but one people, the people of God, his Church. As such, the Church is a temple of which the members are living stones, a people sharing in the royal priesthood of the Lord Jesus, a consecrated nation, a people God claims as his own. But the cornerstone that keeps all these living stones together is Jesus Christ.

Without Jesus, the Church loses its focus and its direction. As a consequence, we can say that like a brick that lies alone is useless when it is not incorporated into a building, so is the life of any Christian. To be Christian is to live in communion with others inside the Church, around Jesus. That is why a solitary Christian is a lost Christian. It is when we are together that we are strong. Then,

Christ, our cornerstone, keeps us together so that we offer to his Father spiritual sacrifices acceptable to him. These consist of a holy life, irreproachable and filled with deeds of love, peace and joy toward our fellows. Each one of us is called to offer up these sacrifices and so, through baptism, each one becomes a priest.

All that helps us understand why Jesus is important for us, as we heard in today's Gospel. First of all, Jesus reassures us that in the house of his Father, there are many places. He goes in order to prepare us a place. After that, he will come back to take us so that where he is we might be with him. Here lies our promise to live with Jesus forever in heaven. As long as we remain faithful to him, we will share in his life. That means also that human death is not a pure perdition, but it opens a possibility of living with Jesus in heaven. Heaven is where Jesus is.

Second, Jesus presents himself as the way, the truth and the life. This is a strong statement that summarizes who Jesus is truly. We are all in search of direction in life, but when we find Jesus, we have found our way. In fact, Jesus does not only give us advice about our life or show us directions to take, but he is the way. He takes us by his hand and leads to the Father. He strengthens us and guides us personally every day so that we come to the purpose for which we have been created, that is, our eternal salvation.

Moreover, many people have told us the truth; many teachers have taught us the truth about different things of life and the world, but none has embodied the truth. Many could say, I told you the truth. Only Jesus can say, "I am the truth". Jesus is the personification of the truth. To know Jesus is to know the truth.

Finally, when people fall in love, I hear them often say, "I never knew what life was until I saw it in your eyes". In other words, love has brought life to the lover. That is exactly what Jesus does; he allows us to discover what life is. To know Jesus is to live truly. Life with Jesus is life indeed. Without Jesus, there is no life. Jesus is life.

Is it true that Jesus is all that? Yes, because the Father is in him and he is in the Father. Whoever who sees Jesus, sees the Father. For that reason, no one can come to the Father except through Jesus. Jesus alone is the way to God. In him alone we see what God is like; and he alone can lead us into God's presence without fear and without shame. May Our Lord Jesus bless each one of you abundantly as we come together to praise him and worship him. God bless you all!

Acts 6, 1-7; Saint Peter 2, 4-9; John 14, 1-12



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