

## Homily—5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

As the number of disciples continued to grow, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. In looking at this sentence we realize that Deacons, and our patron saint Stephen, grew out the selfishness, discrimination and injustice of the first Christian Community in Jerusalem. This is the beginning of the “Serving Church” or the Deaconate. Their labors for the poor and neglected resulted in the community’s growing because of their care for the needy.

What’s great about those early writers of the epistles and Acts is that they were not afraid to air their dirty laundry, although sometimes I think its kind of tabloid news. If we were to rewrite the story, who might the Hellenists widows be and what would they be denied?

Let’s use the example of donuts after the 9:30 as an example. It might go like this in Acts of St Stephen. You go out after mass and there is sign above the table, all those whose ancestors came from an island move to back of the line. How many of you would have been directed to the back, those from England, those from Sicily, those from Hawaii, those from Ireland, those from Philippines those from Hong Kong, even those from Staten Island. Or suppose it said all those whose grandparents spoke with an accent, move to the back of the line, we might be hard pressed to have anyone in front.

When hearing a story like this it’s hard to understand what attracted people to become Christians? I doubt it was this type of behavior. I think perhaps it was Jesus message that I have come that you may have life and to have it more abundantly. So we see in the early times the first followers of Jesus figuring out what kind of Church they were building?

Come to him, a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God, and, like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood. A beautiful image, Come to him and let yourselves be built into a spiritual house. The early Christian community had been inspired at Pentecost and felt unified and eager to continue Christ’s mission. They were inspired but now needed to put that inspiration into action and into a concrete way of living. What was true for them is true for us.

Are we ready to let ourselves be built into a spiritual house? If Christ, our cornerstone, is the architect or designer, what do you think he has in mind? The Gospel story continues our HGTV theme this week of figuring out what a real house designed and built by God looks like. What is a Divine Design? Are we ready to leave some of those critical choices about what our house looks like and important design elements up to someone else? Even Jesus. If we honest, probably not.

So the HGTV theme is: change the world Start at home! Why didn’t I think of that. So if we are willing to take the leap into remodeling our spiritual house. What elements need to be included? See if you recognize the design principles that follow? Would we want these elements in our spiritual house?

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1. Belief in the inherent dignity of the human. The person is the clearest reflection of God among us.

2. Recognizing the human person is both sacred and social. The obligation to "love our neighbor" requires a broader social commitment. Everyone has a responsibility to contribute to the good of the whole society, to the common good.

3. Including a fundamental option for the poor, the moral test of how we treat the most vulnerable members. The option for the poor is an essential part of our effort to achieve the common good. Is this optional?

4. Believing that every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency – starting with food, shelter and clothing, employment, health care, and education. Remember those stories from Operation Rice Bowl we read this lent.

5. Recognizing that the goods of the earth are gifts from God, and they are intended by God for the benefit of everyone. How we treat the environment is a measure of our stewardship, a sign of our respect for the Creator.

6. Include Peace as the fruit of justice and as dependent upon right order among human beings. "Peace is not just the absence of war. It involves mutual respect and confidence between peoples and nations. It involves collaboration and binding agreements." John Paul II

7. Believing we are one human family. We are called to work globally for justice.

If we accept these design principles and materials, these building blocks of Catholic Social teaching, do we need to undergo extensive remodeling, should we just tear down and start from scratch, or should we find a new architect.

But if we did, what design elements would be included? I'll use a personal example. A bit corny after 27 years but here goes. When we got married we made this felt banner (we were so relevant) that symbolized this saying from the prophet Micah, "This is what Yahweh asks, act justly, to love tenderly, and walk humbly with your God."

Sometimes I think people who know us were able to see those design elements in our spiritual house pretty clearly, sometimes we painted or papered them over or covered them up. When we exposed the Micah beams we looked liked this: Cooking dinners for Interfaith homeless shelter, hosting a family shelter at the parish, Sally's Saturday prayers for peace and creating a labyrinth for peaceful meditation, a Maryknoll trip with the kids to Xaoca Mexico to live in the barrio and minister to the poorest of the poor, participating in a Renew program small faith sharing group that has continued to meet faithfully with 5 other couples for about 20 years, surviving teen youth retreats and the 5 PM youth choir, belonging to St Vincent de Paul Society, raising two children who turned out OK, being supported by a faith community through a serious depression and a bout with breast cancer, Sally's work with SVDP in the Tenderloin, my ministry at the SVDP shelter for the those without a home, supporting the work of Comunidad de San Dimas in the Mission.

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But what now, I keep asking myself what am I going to do when I grow up? Am I ready to have my spiritual house remodeled? Am I willing to take the risk? Well remember that a group of us went to the Religious Education Congress in LA, to help us lift our gaze and see anew. Well at one session I heard this presentation by Bill Hoesbch talk about a process for answering three press basic questions: How can we live simply? How can we live sustainably? and how can we live in solidarity with those in need? I was kind of intrigued so I've learned more about it.

The process is called Just Living. Kind of harkens back to the first work of Deacons, to see that everyone got a just portion of the community's goods. The process is grounded in prayer, but Praying is no easy matter. It demands a relationship in which you allow the other to enter into the very center of your person, allowing the Divine One to speak there, allow yourself to be touched at the most sensitive core of your being, allow yourself to be seen - even those parts you would rather leave in darkness. We reflect on church documents, especially everyone's favorite Popolorum Progressio by Pope Paul 6. For those whose Latin is rusty, On the Progress of Ppeoples, 40 year old this Fall. They even put together a light version made for easy reading. For one thing they learned is that gathering to read Church documents is deadly and ineffective.

So Just like the first believers who kind of made it up as they went along, this program lays out a path for reflection with questions and checklists so that those doing it kind of figure out where Jesus is leading them today. So it is kind of scary adventure in that regard. We are choosing the design elements as we go. If you want to hear more about the process of Just Living, come Tuesday, April 22<sup>nd</sup> at 730 to the Parish Office and we'll get started. But at the end of the process I believe we will realize that as St Theresa of Avila said, God has no hands or feet or voice except ours and through these he works."

Or perhaps we will agree with missionary Doctor Albert Schweitzer who said I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.

Each of us is called to find how to do that in our life as Christians, each of us who accepts Christ as our cornerstone is called to reflect how to incorporate the divine design God has in mind for us into our life. We might look to St Stephen as a model who also reminds us what the Lord asks, What kind of house can you build for me? says the Lord. While not called to be a martyr, we are called to take our faith seriously, to accept its challenges, and even to stand up in opposition to what is culturally acceptable.

We are invited to the table to be strengthened by the Lord's body and blood so that we might act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with our God.