

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter - A  
Acts 6:1-7;  
I Peter 2:4-9;  
John 14:1-12  
Little Flower - 5/14/17

My Brothers and Sisters,

The parish staff and I want to wish all mothers a very happy and blessed Mother's Day.

What sets Christians apart from non-Christians is not that we believe in God or that we love and serve others. What sets us apart is that we believe in Jesus Christ. As Jesus said in today's Gospel, "*I am the way and the truth and the life.*" Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis have all stressed that at the heart of faith is the personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Although Christian faith has a personal dimension, it also has a community dimension. It is this community dimension that is often forgotten or minimized today.

St. Peter elaborates on the community dimension of Christianity. According to Peter, as Christians, we are built into a spiritual house with Christ as the cornerstone. The Church, therefore, is, first of all, the community, not the building. Because we are members of this spiritual house built around Jesus, we are "*a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own...*"

However, we are not simply a community of intimacy, but also a community of mission. Peter suggests a two-fold mission. First, we are a holy priesthood called to offer spiritual sacrifices to God. For Peter, spiritual sacrifices were more than the celebration of the Eucharist. As William Barclay wrote, "What God desires most of all is the love of our hearts and the service of our lives. That is the perfect sacrifice which every Christian must make."

Second, we are called to announce the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his own wonderful light. In simple language, we are called to share the Good News of Jesus with others. Therefore, just as Jesus did in the Gospels, Peter linked love of God and love of neighbor inseparably in today's second reading: we are to offer spiritual sacrifices to God and share the Good News of Jesus with others.

In today's reading from Acts, we hear the story of the inauguration of the diaconate. When the Hellenists complained that their widows were neglected in the daily distribution of food, the Twelve said it would not be right for them to neglect God's Word to hand out food. Therefore, they instituted the diaconate. This story makes two very important points.

The apostles adapted to the changing needs of the Church. In reality, the Church has done that throughout the centuries and must continue to do it today if it is going to continue to thrive. Second, the word *diakonia* is the Greek word for *service*. For example, when permanent deacons are ordained in our Archdiocese, besides their assignment to a parish, they receive an assignment to a ministry of charity. Service and charity are as important to the mission of the Church as proclaiming the Gospel and celebrating sacraments.

My brothers and sisters, parents, especially mothers, embody the Gospel ideal of service in their love and care for their children. Last Tuesday was the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my mother's death. There was never any doubt in my mind or in my brother's mind that our mother put our needs and the needs of the family ahead of her own. In his book *Lead Like Jesus*, Ken Blanchard argues that leadership is about influencing others. His first example of leadership is "A mother with a child at any time of day." Mothers have tremendous influence on their children. Although none of our mothers were perfect, today is a day to be grateful to our mothers for helping us grow into the persons we are today, beginning with being grateful to them for their very first gift to us, the gift of life.