

My Brothers and Sisters,

As I thought about the readings during the Easter season, it seemed to me that many of the same themes keep recurring from week to week.

In today's readings, we are reminded, first, that our faith is Christocentric or Christ-centered. In other words, the person of Jesus Christ is the center of our faith. At the Last Supper, Jesus said, "*Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me...I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" The Christocentric nature of our faith is also found in today's reading from First Peter. St. Peter urges us to allow ourselves to "*be built into a spiritual house...to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*"

Second, we are presented with a vision for the Church but also shown the practical reality of the Church. The New Testament offers us many images of the relationship between Christ and the Church. The Church is the Body of Christ. The Church is the Bride of Christ. In today's second reading, Christ is the cornerstone of the spiritual house that is the Church. Also, in this reading, Peter borrows Old Testament images used to describe God's relationship with Israel to describe God's relationship with the Church. "*You are 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own...'*"

At the same time, Peter is clear that God called us to become this spiritual house and the people of God not only for ourselves and our own salvation. For example, God called us to be the People of God so that we might "*...announce the praises' of him who called [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light.*" In *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis reminds us that an essential part of the vocation of every Christian is to evangelize, to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others through the joy of our witness and our lives. The heart of that Good News is the announcement of God's mercy and forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

However, today's reading from Acts of the Apostles shows us that life in the early Christian community was far from perfect. "*As the number of disciples continued to grow, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.*" This gave rise to the diaconate. Both *diaconate* and *deacon* come from the Greek work *diakonia*, which means service. The diaconate was originally established to meet a specific need within the growing Christian community, namely, the distribution of food to the Greek widows.

My brothers and sisters, the establishment of the diaconate demonstrated the Church's ability to adapt to changing circumstances and needs. The early Church was growing. Its growth was complicated by the addition of Gentile converts who felt that the needs of their widows were being neglected. Today our Church is changing. Although the number of practicing Catholics continues to decline, the number of Catholics continues to grow. At the same time, the number of priests is declining while their average age is increasing. Also, the United States, including our own Archdiocese, is becoming more diverse. Therefore, the Church in the United States, including our own Archdiocese, has to adapt. As you may have read in this week's *Criterion*, the Archbishop has scheduled a press conference for Wednesday to announce his *Connected in the Spirit* decisions. *Connected in the Spirit* represents an attempt by the Archdiocese to adapt to changing circumstances and needs within our Archdiocese. Please remember the words of Scripture scholar Aelred Cody: "Among the constant, necessary concerns of all committed members of the Church is that of remaining faithful to our origins and to the purpose for which we exist, while adapting ourselves institutionally and individually to the requirements of our own times."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Aelred Cody, "The Foundation of the Church: Biblical Criticisms for Ecumenical Discussion," *Theological Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 1, March, 1973, p. 1.