

Homily of Fifth Sunday of Easter of Year A, 2023

Acts 6:1-7; Psalm 33:1-2, 4-5, 18-19; 1 Peter 2:4-9; John 14:1-12

The first reading tells us the segregation that existed in the early Christian community in Jerusalem between the Hellenists and Hebrews. The Hellenists were said to be Palestinian Jews who spoke only Greek, while the Hebrews were Palestinian Jews who spoke Hebrew or Aramaic. The Hebrews discriminated against the Hellenists. Unfortunately, segregation, racism, discrimination, and tribalism have continued their ugly impact on our world.

As an African American Catholic community, we are grateful to God for our ancestors who, despite the segregation, racism, and discrimination they experienced, remained Christians and Catholics. Their strong faith is a challenge to us. They handed over to our parents the fruit of their good fight. Our parents, as they are passing away, are trying to hand over to their sons and daughters what they received from their own parents. We all know that the receptivity is poor. The conviction, consistency, energy, passion, and interest are lacking. Jesus, at a time, said to his disciples, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8). If the 'Hebrews' discriminate against the 'Hellenists,' let the 'Hellenists' not lose what they have. Stand strong and continue the good fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:12).

The apostles advised the Christian community to select among themselves people with the following qualities: reputable men, filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom. That was the origin of the deaconate ministry. It is a ministry of service. The qualities of leadership recommended by the apostles are reputable men (men of integrity), filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom. If those who present themselves or those we present for leadership positions have these qualities, our world will be a better place.

We, also, need to learn from the amicable way the apostles resolved the crises in the community. The apostles, without any imposition, urged the community to select those they wanted to be their servants. The deacons were chosen from both isles (the Hellenists and the Hebrews) without reports of fighting, manipulation, or rigging.

In the gospel, Jesus tells us, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me" (John 14:1). He continues, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). Let us bring the troubles of hearts to him and have faith in him. In the second reading, St. Peter calls Jesus "[the] living stone," and "the corner stone" who calls us "out of darkness into his wonderful light." St. Peter assures us, "Whoever believes in [him] shall not be put to shame."

In the gospel, Jesus says, "Whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12). How can we perform "greater works" than Jesus? Is this possible? What message is Jesus communicating to us? Jesus lived for about 33 years and did his ministry for three years and only in Israel. But today, Christianity has reached every corner of the world. This is the "greater work" believers have done from the apostles to our time. What "greater work" am I doing? We pray that God continues to use us to do "greater work" wherever we find ourselves. Amen.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP