

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, A Cycle May 17-18, 2014

First reading: Acts 6:1-7 *They chose deacons to serve the needs of both Greeks & Hebrews*

Psalm 33 "Let your mercy be on us, O God, as we place our trust in you"

Second Reading: 1 Peter 2:4-9 *The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.*

Gospel: John 14:1-12 *I am the way, the truth and the life.*

♪♪ Peace is flowing like a river flowing out of you and me.

Flowing out into the desert, setting all the captives free. ♪♪

How can we sing that song today? A group of young women have been kidnapped and are still prisoners in Nigeria because they dared to seek an education; many people are without jobs or even homes, families are still rebuilding after floods & fires; the environment is threatened by greed and misinformation, the rich manipulate the truth and neglect the poor and vulnerable. Congress refuses to act on immigration and other issues of the common good. How can we sing about peace?

Part of the answer comes from the first words of the Gospel today, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God; have faith also in me." I hear Jesus saying to us today, "I know what your world is like. I know what your life is like. Put your trust in me and I will give you peace."

Last Monday, Sr. Anna, Lynn and I heard a bishop speak - his name is Frank Caggiano & he is the Bishop of Bridgeport, CT. He was amazing - and has several Youtube videos online. His message was that we are called to believe and to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and not the false gospel of so much of our culture, which he described as: "It's all about me."

This message, this attitude is so ingrained in our culture that we can miss it - and be blind to it all around us, and even, sometimes, in ourselves. If you want to see a clear image of what it means to believe that "It's all about me" watch Sheldon on the Big Bang Theory. The world revolves around him, and he does not even perceive the needs of anyone else.

What Jesus calls us to is nothing less than a "Copernican" revolution. Copernicus got in trouble because he discovered that the earth revolves around the sun, and not the sun around the earth, as almost all of his contemporaries believed.

We are called by Jesus to discover that everything does not revolve around me, but that I am called to put him at the center of my attention and my heart. That is what receiving communion is about - whether it is for the 1st time or the 1000 & 1st. As I say at the time of Communion - paraphrasing St. Augustine - We are called to be what we receive, to receive who we are.

But to live with Jesus at the center is not at all easy. It means I have to go against what many people think is most important. I like to go fishing when I can, and I learn from the trout I meet, both the ones I catch and the ones that get away. You see, trout and salmon always face upstream. Their food comes from the strongest part of the current.

When they spawn, they go even farther upstream to lay their eggs to provide for future generations. Mark Nepo, in a set of meditations called "The Book of Awakening," writes about this.

*"Salmon make their way upstream by bumping repeatedly into blocked pathways until they find where the current is strongest. Somehow they know that the unimpeded rush of water means that there is no obstacle there, and so they enter this opening fervently, for, though it is the hardest going, the way is clear. The lesson here is as unnerving as it is helpful"*

The lesson I heard is that we have to face the reality of our world as it is, and to look at who we really are: both gifted and in need of conversion. That is not only true of you and me today, it has always been true of the Church Jesus founded.

In the first reading for today there is a racial problem: the Hellenists, those who spoke Greek, were being neglected. The Apostles faced right into the current of this problem and decided to make sure that all were served, so they appointed deacons who could minister to the Christians of both Hebrew & Greek origins. The Church is still learning how to serve all its members - regardless of their race, language or ethnic background.

We were in Pass Christian, Mississippi during Lent a few years ago doing a Parish Mission for a parish with three "Church Houses." It was the most integrated parish community we had ever experienced. There were not pockets of white and black parishioners, in different sections of the worshipping community, the people, the choir, all the ministries were a blend of both African American and various Caucasian ethnic groups.

The story of how this came about was truly inspiring. In 1969 there were two parishes within 4 miles of each other, one serving black Catholics and the other made up of white Catholics. They were both served by members of the Trinitarian Fathers & Brothers. Then hurricane Camille came, and totally destroyed the white parish church.

The black community invited the members of the white parish to worship with them. After three years of doing this, it was working so well that the people and their priests decided not to build a separate church but to continue to worship as one community. And they were still doing it in 2009, when we were there. It was working, because they were all working together! Since then, they have built a new church building to replace the three that were there before, where all worship together. Just like in the first reading today, we are called to be a church that embraces all cultures.

In the 2nd reading, St. Peter quotes the great Easter Psalm, Ps. 118, *"the stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."* He is speaking of Jesus, who was rejected - and rose from the dead to become the cornerstone of the church.

But that truth applies to many other situations as well - like the situation in the first reading from Acts; like the persecutions during the early years of the church, and those that are going on today; like the obstacles our culture presents to us.

These obstacles are the current we have to face if we are to be faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Even the storms & floods of 2011 - which were events we would like to have avoided - became the cornerstone of a new sense of community and new life in many of the Christian congregations that suffered from them. In Middleburgh, we are still eating together every Wednesday because we had to feed each other after Irene hit.

We are the body of Christ, who is the stone the builders rejected, so we can expect to meet obstacles & problems. To really live our faith, we need to remember who is our Lord and our center.

Some people say that the church belongs to them, not to the hierarchy or their pastor. I would like to take it a step further: The Church, this parish does not belong to your pastoral leader, to the bishop or to the Pope OR to you. It belongs to Christ. And the clear current of truth & life that will save us has a name: Jesus! He says "I am the way, the truth and the life." The only way to live the song I played at the beginning of these reflections is to be like a trout and turn our faces to the one who is our peace. Peace and life will not flow out of us unless we let them flow into us. And the source of that living water is Christ. And if we do face into the current of his living water, we will find our way as a church and a human family through the obstacles and rapids of war, terror, scandal, change and grief.

As we gather today, let us ask him to call us out of darkness into his wonderful light, not once but time and time again. Then we will truly be able to sing:

♪♪ "Life is flowing like a river flowing out of you and me.  
Flowing out into the desert, setting all the captives free. ♪♪