

I recall an event happening many years ago at either a Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner when my entire family gathered together. At the end of that meal, my older siblings and I had a conversation with my parents. The older sibs and I were under the impression that my parents were now less strict and less demanding of the younger ones. Where the older sibs and I were given a talking-to if we brought home a “B” or, God forbid a “C” on our report cards, the occasional less-than-average grade that a younger sibling brought home was now acceptable. Where we had a strict and comprehensive chore schedule, the younger sibs had fewer household responsibilities given to them than we did. Where four or sometimes five of us would share a single bedroom, my youngest brother and sister had their own room – with a phone and TV, no less. Distressed by all this, we asked my parents what had happened. The current treatment of my younger sibs seemed so unfair compared to what we experienced. Without hesitation my mom responded with a conversation-stopping answer, “you’re father and I are tired. We’re really tired.”

It also dawned on me some time later that the older sibs helped with caring for the younger ones in years past. When it was just the two or three at home after the rest of us moved out, there was no one to assist my mom and dad with caring for our younger brother or sister. Of course my parents were tired.

In the early Christian community described in the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, a group of non-Jewish, Greek-speaking Christians were complaining that the needs of their

group were not being met. I'm guessing that those who led the various Jewish communities were tired. They could barely take care of their own people, let alone take care of those from another community. The demands they were striving to meet were never-ending, just like the demands my parents faced those many years ago.

Blessedly, the Holy Spirit inspired the leaders of those communities to do something, so that all people – Jews and non-Jews - would be equally and fairly ministered to. So the apostles and disciples convened to choose seven people – today, we would call them deacons – to assist with caring for those in need among all the people, Jews and Greek-speaking Gentiles alike. In particular, they ministered to widows and orphans who couldn't care for themselves because they were abandoned by government leaders of the day. The burden of ministry which fell on just a few leaders was now expanded to include other talented and dedicated people in order to ease that burden and more fairly assist those most in need.

The genius of that structure is seen in how the Church is organized today. There are deacons who function as evangelizers of the faith. They are specifically called to help the marginalized – those in need of food and those who need assistance because they are unjustly treated. There are priests who function as ministers of the sacraments while also preaching and teaching. There are consecrated religious women and men who commit themselves to taking on specific ministries – teaching in our schools, offering healing and consolation in our hospitals, feeding the hungry, as well as bringing God's compassion to the immigrant. There are dedicated lay people, who by the grace and

virtue of their baptism assist with teaching the faith, feeding the hungry, and leading other ministries in the Church. This approach to building up God's Kingdom among us by all these gifted, talented, and commissioned individuals reflects what is found in that statement, "many hands make light work." That was the case in my family and for my parents as we helped one another. And that is the case with Christ's Church as his Kingdom is built up around us.

There is a danger with this model of ministry and service, however. Some feel that the burden of ministry is the sole responsibility of the clergy, religious, or a handful of dedicated lay folks. At the end of today's second reading, St. Peter says, "**you** are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a people of his own, so that **you** many announce the praises of (God)...." Notice that St. Peter didn't say, "someone else has the responsibility of living out the faith. Someone else is responsible for volunteering to help those in need. Someone else should teach our children and youth." Rather, St. Peter stresses that **all of us, that is YOU**, have the responsibility in ministering to the People of God. Serving as ministers for the Church and volunteering to share the Good News of Christ isn't someone else's responsibility. It is **our** responsibility.

As we revel in the joy of Christ's resurrection during this Easter Season, we need to ask how we specifically and intentionally share that Good News with others. I am grateful to the many faithful of this parish who so generously and selflessly engage in ministry in our community and beyond. Your witness and faithful service are signs to us of Christ present in our midst. If

you are not involved in some kind of ministry or outreach, then I encourage you to reflect on how you can begin doing so.

This kind of responsibility may seem overwhelming. Perhaps our reaction to a commissioning like this might be similar to how the Apostle Thomas reacted to Jesus in today's gospel. Exasperated by the enormity of being commanded by Jesus to live out the faith, Thomas exclaimed, "Lord, I'm not sure what to do. I'm not sure of the way forward."

If we doubt or if we are worried about the way forward, Jesus gives us a simple reminder as to what we should do. As he told St. Thomas at the Last Supper (the setting for today's gospel reading), we are to focus on him. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. We are to follow Christ. We are to seek the truth that only he can give and not to rely on what the world deems to be true. Faithfully following Christ is the way that leads to eternal life. Such a calling requires our attention, our commitment, and our persistence in making Christ and his Kingdom visible among us. We do that by directly serving others. We do that by serving others as we wish to be served as God commanded. We do that even when we are tired, when our faith is tested or weak, and when we're not even sure what we should do next. Focusing on Christ and pledging to do his will is enough.

May Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life guide us, enlighten us, and fill us with his abundant grace as we follow him and seek to do his will in all things.

Amen? Amen!