

## Bishop's Reflection – 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

The early Christians were not without their problems, nor were they without their divisions. In today's First Reading, a group of Greek speaking Christians complain to the Apostles that the money raised in charity is only going to the Hebrew speaking widows. It should not be too surprising to us that some of the first problems focus on money and preferential treatment.

The Apostles are quick to act. They call together the entire community and propose a solution. "Select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task." In other words, they are asking the community to find seven people that are able to look after the matter.

The solution may sound familiar to us, because it isn't far from how our parishes deal with similar matters. Whenever there is a legitimate need, men and women "of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom," are found to look after what needs doing. This is true in matters of finances, fundraising, charitable outreach, religious education and various other ministries. No one person can actually deal with everything. It is only by a concerted effort, drawing on the time, talents and resources of the entire community, that a parish can be sustained in all of its many needs.

But let them be filled with the Spirit. Ministries cannot be separated from the Spirit that guides them. Too often ministries are approached strictly from a menial stand point, as things that need doing, and not as opportunities to truly minister God's love to others and to know God's love in our own lives. This was not the case with Stephen or Philip, the first two men set aside in today's First Reading. It is in and through his ministry of the charity and the Word of God that Stephen ends up bearing witness to Christ with his life. It is in and through his ministry to the Word of God that Philip goes out to convert the Samaritans and speaks to the Ethiopian official along the road.

Ministry begins in contemplating the Father's Face in and through his Son, Jesus. When the Apostle Philip says, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied", he touches on a deeper truth. Jesus reminds him, however, that "whoever has seen me has seen the Father." All our efforts will come to naught, unless they have their origin and end in the ministry of Christ himself. It is only as the Church is conformed to Christ, especially in his willingness to lay down his life for his flock, that the Church will have any measure of success.

Not only that, we have his word on it. He tells us, "the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father." In essence, "the best is still to come", and the Church's history is proof of that. More people have been healed, more nations have been taught, more communities have been reconciled and set free from past enslavements than in Jesus' days. His "going to the Father" has born fruit through his powerful intercession and gift of the Holy Spirit. The Church may still face a multitude of problems and moments of division, not unlike the days of the Apostles, but our strength lies in him who calls us and equips us for the task we were called to do.