

## Easter 5.08

1. The readings for this 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter talk about the life of the first community in Jerusalem and about our home in heaven. In the first reading taken from the Acts of the Apostles we hear about problems which the first community in Jerusalem was having. Apparently this first community, like us, distributed food, although, unlike us, the food went to the members of the community itself. But this community was bi-lingual, some members speaking Aramaic, others Greek. Moreover, it seems that the members of the community who were receiving food were widows. That makes sense. Widows in that society would have had to depend on other family members or, in this case, on their religious community. But the widows who spoke Greek were complaining because they thought that the widows who spoke Aramaic were being treated better than they were. Maybe those giving out the food were favoring them because they too spoke Aramaic rather than Greek. The Greek-speaking widows appealed to the Twelve who then decided that the community should choose seven men to attend to the needs of the Greek-speaking widows, and they would in turn appoint those chosen to the work of distributing the food fairly. This is the origin of deacons in our church. The word deacon means to serve. All office holders in the

church should serve, but the deacons were originally appointed to table service. The Twelve thought that this was a good solution because they did not think they would have time to perform this service. They felt that they should devote themselves to praying and preaching. So, those of you who work on Wednesdays and Thursdays in our pantry must remember this when you see that you are doing the work and I am leaving. Just presume that I am off to pray and preach. Each of us has a different way of serving the community, although all of our services come from the same source, our love for the community and its Lord, and have the same end, the building up of the community, first our own community, the church, and then the larger community, the world in which we live.

2. Today's Gospel offers us a very touching image of Jesus. He is going ahead of us to the Father to prepare a home for us there, and he will return to take us there with himself. Is God really so tender? Is Jesus really so tender? We know how we feel when someone, a friend or a member of our family, offers us hospitality. We feel such love for those who have put themselves out to prepare a meal or even a room for us. They have worked on our behalf. This Gospel interprets the resurrection as Jesus' going ahead of us to the Father's house to prepare a place there for us

and the end of the world—or of our individual lives--as his coming back to get us to take us there. Let us believe that and rejoice in this belief! How much God cares for us! How much the Lord Jesus cares for us!

3. Hospitality is a gift. People invite us into their homes. But do we have to do anything to prepare for this gift? Well, we have to accept it when it is offered. But what about the gift of a home in heaven? Yes, we have to accept this gift, and the acceptance of this gift means adopting a new way of living. If we don't adopt this new way of living, our lives tell the Father and the Lord Jesus that we really don't want the gift of a home in heaven. This new life is a life of faith, hope and love. Let us live this way so that God will see that we are interested in being offered a home in heaven.

4. Here is an amusing little story by a Dick Folger from the Commentary *Celebration* which talks about our part in preparing to receive this heavenly gift:

“A very wealthy man died and went to heaven. He was met at the Pearly Gates by St. Peter and led down golden streets to the residential section to claim his new home. They passed many mansions—huge, splendid, and with great green lawns in front. At the end of the street they stopped in front of a windowless shack built out of old plywood panels. The rich

man asked St. Peter why he was getting this hovel when there were so many beautiful mansions he could live in. St. Peter replied, 'I did the best with what you sent us.'”