

# Homily for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

May 11-12, 2019

Readings: Acts 13:14,42-52; Revelations 7:9, 14B-17; John 10:27-30

Preacher: Deni Mack

Today throughout the entire world, Mass goers hear from the Acts of the Apostles, “So they shook the dust off their feet in protest against them and went...!” What were they protesting; why did they leave? Religious leaders of that time saw the crowds Paul and Barnabas gathered and, the scripture tells us, “with jealousy and with violent abuse” expelled Paul and Barnabas from that territory. What we’ve carried through the ages is Paul and Barnabas’ reaction. They, filled with the Holy Spirit brought Jesus’ love to the ends of the earth. They were empowered by Jesus who said, “You are a light to the Gentiles...”

Today we also hear, “John had a vision of a great multitude ...from every nation, race, people and tongue...holding palm branches. These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress.”

Those who no longer come to church seem to have shaken the dust from their feet. Why do we stay and they leave? Probably as many reasons as there are people.

Surveys tell us young people leave because they see church as irrelevant or worse—corrupt. A 27-year-old man who loves a young Catholic woman has no desire to attend Mass with her. He said, “How can I listen to someone who may have covered up for a priest who abused children?”

Some stay. Thirty-one-year-old Megan, a lawyer said, “we want to raise our children Catholic because our families brought us up in faith and we find all the encouragement we need right here where our church bulletin quotes Pope Francis on building bridges not walls, welcoming the stranger, caring for God’s creation. Our children’s first communion preparation had us sharing the lunch we made with our child with another child and his family. At our first communion family tour of the church, every word and gesture was reverent and delightfully appropriate for seven-year-olds. We were given a picture of many people at Jesus’ last supper including some

women who, of course, must have been there since they accompanied Jesus to Jerusalem from Galilee. We were given faith sharing prompts on Matthew 25:36-41. In other words our parish does not stick its head in the sand.”

As I listened to Megan, I felt bathed in her light. She is a light to the Gentiles. She may well be a light to many in her work, in her neighborhood. And she is a light in our first communion program; we see and hear people’s reaction to her. Among her friends is Ann, a white woman married to a man of color, a professor from Kenya. Megan and Ann and about 30 others participated in our adult faith enrichment series on civil discourse. One of the presenters was Judy, a woman of color, a lawyer who belongs to two Catholic parishes, one of which is mostly black. Judy had us share our insights in small groups. Ann spoke of her need to prepare her sons with great care in her fear that her sons of color will be mistreated or worse by police. As she hesitantly spoke, my understanding deepened as never before. Megan’s and others’ compassion for Ann and for our world in such distress, was profound.

The participants in that series on civil discourse share the evangelist John’s vision of a great multitude...from every nation and every race... surviving a time of great distress.

How are we a light to all around us?

How is Christ’s light piercing the darkness of racism and violence, of dehumanization and demonization, of greed and need?

So much in the news and in our face tries to dim Christ’s light in us. We ask, how does Christ’s light become brighter? And God comes through with a story of hope, of resolve, of resilience, of truth told by some one whose light has not dimmed. We each are storytellers of light just as were Paul and Barnabas. The light empowers us as mightily as the light empowered Paul and Barnabas.

And today’s Gospel assures us. Jesus knows us; we hear him. No one will take us out of his hand and no one will take us out of Jesus’ Father’s hand.

