

[Readings: Acts 14:21-27; Psalm 145; Rev. 21:1-5a; John 13:31-33a, 34-35]

We have many funerals here at St. Martin de Porres. And as part of our celebration of the life of the deceased and the renewal of our own faith in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, we invite the family of the deceased to select the readings and funeral music for the day of the Mass of the Resurrection.

Ironically, many of the readings that we hear during these Easter Sundays are readings that appear in the Funeral Mass book of readings. Today, two of the three readings are such readings. But they apply not to a dead person but to a community on the decline. They apply not to a loved one who is about to be buried, but to a church community that is about to be risen from the dead. Listen.

From today's First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles: "It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God." In order for us to deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ and with the Church He founded, we need to change -- we need to encounter Jesus Christ, we need to grow in His Holy Spirit, and we need to witness our faith to others.

For decades, I always thought that the hardest thing for me to do in life is change. To change my way of thinking. To change my way of living. To change my way of relating to others. But do you know what we hate more than change? You and I hate the time and energy needed during the transition!

We have to move into a new house. I don't mind that we are going to be living in a new house. It's the sorting, the packing, the recycling, and the travel back and forth several times that I hate. You, too? I have been transferred to a new job, or I am recently retired. I don't mind the new job, or I am grateful to be able to afford to retire. But I hate the transition of having to learn a new routine, having to learn and remember a whole slew of new names, and, if I am retired now, having to see and to be with my spouse 24/7! You too?

Yet if, with the grace of God, we are successful in the transition, then the spirit of today's Second Reading from the Book of Revelation takes root. We will see "a new heaven and a new earth." The old life is gone and a new life is embraced. Tears are wiped away. God is with us forever, making all things new!

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus says to His followers, “Come and see, come follow me.” As He leaves this earth for eternity, He says, “Go and make disciples.” Today, He says, “Love one another.” That is the essential job description of the authentic Christian disciple. Follow. Love. Go and make.

This was the spirit of the Synod that took place in the Archdiocese of Detroit back in 1969, four years after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council in Rome. I know most of you here were not born yet in 1969...

The Holy Spirit inspired Church leadership and their advisors to write some of the most thoughtful, compassionate and inspiring teachings in our history as a Church. The Second Vatican Council breathed new life into the Church; Synod '69 in Detroit put flesh and bones on it.

Following Synod 2016, Archbishop Vigneron is calling every Catholic in every parish to move from a mindset of maintenance to a spirit of mission. To breathe new life into the tired old bones of our parishes. To “Unleash the Gospel” in the Archdiocese of Detroit.

Archbishop Vigneron is asking every pastor and every parish in the Archdiocese of Detroit to create a Missionary Strategic Plan. This is the next phase in our movement to “Unleash the Gospel” in southeast Michigan, so as to become a missionary diocese by being faithful to the vision of Synod '16. The MSP process is an effort to respond to the pastoral letter’s call that every activity and resource of the parish be in alignment with the fundamental commitment to evangelization.

The process of creation and implementation of MSPs is being developed. The process in each parish will be rooted in prayer; allow time for reflection and formation in Unleash the Gospel; and reflect parishioner input. The goal is the development of a practical and concrete strategy to focus all parish activity and efforts towards mission and respond to the Synod Propositions for families and parishes. 10 parishes were selected to start the process this spring; another 10 or 20 parishes will be in the second wave this summer. The rest will enter the process over the next year and a half. That will include our parish.

This weekend, Paul and Barnabas are still together, which means we are en route on Paul's first or three missionary journeys. They will break up over a difference of opinion concerning fellow missionary John Mark before long, but at the moment they are full of wonder at the great things God is doing everywhere they go. It is sad and a little unnerving to think of Paul and Barnabas separating.

Barnabas sponsored Paul into the Christian community when no one else was willing to touch his conversion with a 10-foot pole. As missionaries, they have proclaimed the Gospel, suffered hardships, prayed, and celebrated Mass together. Why they finally split up over a personnel issue is hard to fathom. But it does remind us that the Church has roots, both human and divine, from its inception. Disciples on their mission don't always get along with each other!

At the end of the first journey, the missionaries have nothing but good news to report. They acknowledge the necessity of enduring hardships but find the work God has done with them more compelling to talk about. When you read the circumstances of their journey, you are surprised that their report is made with such unqualified enthusiasm. Clearly, the response of the Gentiles to the story of salvation is so exciting to them that the rest pales in comparison.

Are we stuck in a rut in our individual lives, or within this generation, or marooned at this point of human history? It can feel that way at times, but only because time and the danger and the fear of the adventure of change is blocking our perspective. The command to love is the call to be made new, and it is the one force divinely imbued with the power to move even mountains when necessary. If we love one another, and do not settle for less, then we will discover what the first apostles knew along their journey: the endless delight of what God can do and how all the old barriers to love dissolve as we become open to the possibility. ALLELUIA and AMEN!