

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

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, 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!

Camping on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon almost a century ago, Theodore Roosevelt took in the view and declared: "There it is, magnificent. Man cannot improve upon it; leave it alone." Apparently, the old Earth was pretty good, too, at least as far as Teddy Roosevelt was concerned!

As pastor, I insist that every parish meeting I attend, must begin with prayer. I usually choose the Gospel for the upcoming Sunday Mass, with a brief reflection followed by reflection questions. The discussion is always inspiring. Until my most recent meeting. The Opening Prayer was the Gospel passage you just heard. Nobody had anything to say. Total silence. For the first time.

When I went home that night, I looked at the reflection questions. What was so intimidating about it that it froze us into a stunned silence? Here were the questions:

Which of my relationships are centered around my relationship with God? What movements of collaboration do I see in my parish?

In my workplace? In my family? What do we do to show that we are disciples of Jesus within our parish community and larger ones?

So, I'm not using those questions today. Here are some others: How does your attitude, your words and your actions more deeply open your faith and our Church to others? Or do we drive them away? Where do YOU suffer as part of your Christian vocation, and what suffering can you let go of and move beyond?

Patrice Touhy, a spiritual writer, shares this story. When my 14-year-old daughter Hannah was asked why she wanted to be confirmed into the Catholic faith, she answered: "Because God needs me." It wasn't the answer her class had prepared or the Catechism teaches. I am not even sure it is quite theologically sound: Does God *need* anyone? I don't doubt that God relies on Hannah, who has Down Syndrome, and others who don't meet society's standards of perfection to show us how woefully limited our perceptions of beauty, success, and happiness are. Instinctively, or more probably through the grace of God, Hannah knows that she is God's ambassador to the Kingdom where all you need is love.

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. AMEN! ALLELUIA!