

Easter VII

“In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons).”

As I was reading this passage earlier this week the phrase that struck me was in fact the parenthetical phrase in which we are told “together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons.” Think about that number. Jesus is crucified and raised from the dead. Seven weeks or so after his resurrection the persons who are the church at that time, one hundred twenty people, will, through the casting of lots and the blessing of the Holy Spirit, determine the immediate future of this nascent Christian community. This young, frightened yet committed people will soon be blessed by the imparting of the Holy Spirit upon them as a church. That community of one hundred twenty people became the foundation for the spread of the good news about Jesus, about people being raised up in his name, being reconciled in his name, being healed in his name and being made whole in his name.

That small, first Christian community grew for several reasons. First, they believed in God and not only entrusted their lives into God’s hands but believed that their God would mold and direct their lives. Secondly, they were convinced that their well-being depended upon the faith community of which they were a part. And thirdly, they knew that their health as individuals and as a community was depended upon, as our prayer book informs us, that they continue in the prayers of the community and the breaking of the bread, participating in and receiving the Holy Eucharist.

We the baptized of God in this place are called to be the spreaders of the good news about Jesus. What we learn from the early church is that we cannot do that if we are negligent in our thoughts or our actions. The Christian life requires commitment, not some sort of collegial alliance. It requires a willingness to say and to live into the idea that God is primary

in my life and when we fall short of that to acknowledge that when God is not primary I become separated from who I am and contradict whom I am called to be.

Our Christian vocation is also enhanced and enlightened when it is lived out within a faith community. We can find and worship God anywhere but I am convinced God calls us into relationship with those around us because it is those around us, including ourselves, who become God's hands of healing, who become God's instruments of reconciliation, God's heart for compassionate and understanding behavior; God's mind that challenges us and exhorts us to new understandings and God's grace that soothes our fears, assuages our fear and anxiety and raises us up when we fall.

A faith community of one hundred twenty people in Jerusalem. The well-being of the community around us is dependent upon our personal commitment to God and the abiding willingness to offer our gifts, our talents and our prayers, not occasionally but regularly. The formula for success as individuals and as a parish family began with those first one hundred twenty people. They believed in God and trusted that God would direct and mold their lives. Secondly, they recognized that their spiritual well-being depended upon being surrounded by their faith community. Thirdly they knew that continuing in the prayers within the community and the coming together to break bread was essential to the well-being of their soul.

It is a great formula and it succeeds when each of us accept responsibility for our part in enhancing the well-being of this parish family, not to protect, maintain and insure an institution but to strengthen our lives as people of God that we might grow in our own lives and be of value to all those lives we touch.

Amen