



Impact

Discipleship. Stewardship. Evangelization.

May, 2019 As is always the case during Easter, we ponder readings from the Acts of the Apostles each Sunday of the season. In a moment in which many people are weighed down by the effects of scandal and polarization in the Church and the growing secularization and pressure to leave active practice of the faith behind, the stories of the early communities of believers may rouse our commitments to be Church in our time. This is our focus for the May issue of Impact. May you find hope, light, and peace as you live and proclaim the Good News of the Risen Lord this Easter season.— Leisa Anslinger and Amberly Boerschinger

Homily Connections

May 5: Throughout the Easter season, the first reading is from the Acts of the Apostles and the second reading is from the book of Revelation. Today's first reading tells of the apostles' encounter with the Sanhedrin. The second reading from Revelation is a fitting companion to the first reading and the gospel, with its image of the faithful ones worshipping the Lamb. In today's gospel, Jesus appears to the weary and confused apostles. Much has been written and pondered in Jesus' three-fold question to Peter, "do you love me?" Peter's denial of the Lord at his passion and his dejection in facing Jesus in today's narrative stand in stark contrast to his bold proclamation of the Good News in the first reading.

Connecting with everyday life: The apostles' conviction in proclaiming Jesus as the Christ is both compelling and challenging. Invite your people to ask themselves if they have similar strength in facing the doubts and questions of people today — when friends or family members question why they believe in Jesus, place their trust in God, and continue to actively participate in the Church, what is their response? Share your own response as you feel comfortable doing so. This would be a great Sunday to invite people to linger after Mass to share time and experiences with one another, or to invite a parishioner to offer a lay witness about the impact of faith in his or her life. (Page 1)

May 12: This Sunday's first reading shares the experience of Paul and Barnabas as they share the light of Christ with the Jews and converts to Judaism as well as to Gentiles, how the Jewish leaders rejected them, and how, filled with the Holy Spirit, they faced persecution. The reading from Revelation echoes the perspective of the apostles — when Christ is at the center, all is well. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, assures us that in him, we have the assurance of eternal life.

Connecting with everyday life: We, too, are to be light, to be "an instrument of salvation to the ends of the earth." Ask your people to consider their call to share their faith with others. What challenges do they face in doing so? Share the things people often note about being uncomfortable talking about faith, as well as the impact of those who do share their relationship with the Lord, through words and actions. This could be a good moment to invite people to consider a small faith sharing group if there are open groups or the possibility of starting new groups at your parish. (Bottom article, page 2)

May 19: We hear today of Paul and Barnabas' missionary journeys, how they established and nurtured early Christian communities, and how they insured that the communities were in the care of faithful leaders. In Revelation, we take heart that God dwells with us. Today's gospel is taken from the Last Supper narrative of the Gospel

of John (remember that this narrative is an extended reflection on the call of discipleship, placed in the context of the Last Supper). Disciples are to have love for one another, giving glory to God whose love we know through Christ Jesus.

Connecting with everyday life: Through Christ's resurrection, death, sin, and human frailty no longer have the last word. The final word is the Word of God, on whose enduring love we rely. Like the early communities established by Paul and Barnabas, we encounter Christ's love in sacraments and prayer, and through our relationships with one another. Invite your people to reflect on their relationship with one another in your parish community. Ask those who are deeply rooted in the community to reflect on the impact of this in their lives, and to draw others in, to service and sharing, participation, and social opportunities. Ask those who are not involved to take a step toward more active participation. Assure them that they are valued and that the parish desires their presence. Ask ministry coordinators or pastoral council members to be on hand after Masses to answer questions and warmly welcome those who linger to talk or are ready to participate in a parish ministry or group. (Top article, page 2)

May 26: "It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us..." Today's first reading tells the story of what is known as the Council of Jerusalem, in which we hear of the discernment of policies regarding Gentiles who were accepting Christ. In today's gospel, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit, who brings insight, inspiration and peace.

Connecting with everyday life: Invite your people to reflect on the strength and the challenge of living as community in a world that prizes the individual and is often isolating. Being members of Christ's Body calls us together in communion with the Lord and into community with one another. As in our own families, sometimes this means that we must put our own preferences aside for the sake of the family of faith. This is a good Sunday to speak to any challenges you might be experiencing in your parish, and how, with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, you and your parish leaders discern together the shape of life in your parish. (Page 1)

At Parish Meetings or in Adult Faith Formation this Month

Opening Prayer

Alleluia! Risen Christ,
you live, even when we find it difficult to perceive you;
you reign over darkness, pain and death;
you have promised that you are with us,
and that through you, we know our heavenly Father.
Stay with us! Help us to live your resurrection
as good and faithful stewards. Amen.

Listen to Sacred Scripture: Acts 14:21-27 (First Reading, May 19)

Read: The article on page 1 of the April Impact.

Share: your thoughts, using the questions that are offered in Impact this month to guide your conversation.

Commit: Make a firm commitment to invite someone to a parish ministry or event or to share a faith experience with another.

Offer one another a sign of Christ's peace.

When we speak of the Church, we touch upon a deep mystery. The Church is an institution, made up of parishes and dioceses throughout the world. Yet the Church is not only an institution. The Church is the Body of Christ. As members of Christ's Body, we are the Church, and are called to live as the abiding life of Christ in the world.

Being members of the Church is sometimes difficult. We see and bear the weight of the failings of others and struggle to find God's grace in these demanding times. It is difficult to hold firm to our convictions as Catholic Christians when family and friends question our reasons for remaining within the Church.

Throughout Jesus' earthly ministry, he drew people to himself and to one another. Jesus knew that we need each other. He knew the failings of the apostles who denied and abandoned him at the most painful moment of his life in his passion and death on the cross. Still, he forgave them and urged them to embrace his mission together with one another.

As he prepared his disciples for his ascension, he asked them to remain together, promising that he would send an Advocate, One who would be with the early believers to guide them, give them wisdom, and provide them with courage as they fulfilled his command of love and service.

When we read the accounts of the early Church during this Easter season, we realize that Jesus' promise was fulfilled, and continues to be. We may sometimes wonder how we can remain with the Church in the face of scandal and polarization. In such times, we rely on the Holy Spirit and one another, as we strive to be good stewards of the Church, imperfect people who must be ready to show and to share Christ's perfect love, mercy, forgiveness, and compassion. ©Catholic Life and Faith, 2019

Impact this month

This Easter season, renew your relationship with Jesus and reflect on your relationship with others in your parish.

What connections do you already have in your faith community? Do you have faith-filled friends who might be willing to meet once a month or who could introduce you to a small group community? Do you have interests that could connect you with something going on in your larger faith community? Are there people you know with whom you might reach out in service, companionship, or sharing as a witness to your faith?

Make a commitment to strengthen ties to your faith community in some specific way this month.

Becoming who we are called to be, together. — by Leisa Anslinger

I was once at a parish meeting in which people were sharing the impact of their relationships with one another on their lives and faith. One woman voiced what many were trying to say, “When we do this together, it just isn’t as scary.” Life can be challenging; we all face situations we simply don’t know how to navigate; we might say it is sometimes “scary” to try to live as a person of faith. At the very least, living as a Christian is not always easy in today’s world.

Throughout the Easter season, we hear the story of the earliest Christian communities through the First Reading at Mass, which is taken from the Acts of the Apostles. In Acts, we hear how the Holy Spirit emboldened the apostles to proclaim the Risen Christ as Savior and Lord. The apostles prayerfully discerned together how they were to live, applying Jesus’ model and teaching to their lives in community. They relied on one another, even as they faced persecution and for some, martyrdom.

This Easter season, listen to the readings from Acts with your own life in mind. In what ways does belonging within the Christian community encourage and help you to live and grow as a person of faith? Are there friends in your parish or beyond it to whom you turn or rely upon when you face doubt, struggle with the demands of discipleship, or need support from others? Is there someone in your parish, young or old, with whom you share faith and life?

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During the Synod [on young people] one of the young auditors from the Samoan Islands spoke of the Church as a canoe, in which the elderly help to keep on course by judging the position of the stars, while the young keep rowing, imagining what waits for them ahead...let us all climb aboard the same canoe and together seek a better world, with the constantly renewed momentum of the Holy Spirit. - Christus Vivit, 201

A Family of Faith

Amy’s small faith group had been together for years. They met on a parish retreat when most were in their late twenties, and they have remained together ever since, inviting new women to join them in faith reflection, service, and sharing. They have encouraged each other through the early years of parenting; consoled one another through the early death of one of their group; shared in the joys and challenges of life at home and work; served the needs of the poor side-by-side.

Amy took all this for granted until last month, when for a few weeks it seemed she might be moving to a different city. Suddenly, the importance of this small group of women in her life became clear. While her family would be with her in the new city, there would be a hole where her small group had once been.

Overjoyed that she is not going to have to move, she has a new appreciation for her small group. “I now know that we have come to be family,” Amy told them last night. “You call me to be my best self and to live my faith every day, and for that I am very grateful!”

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