

Genesis 18:1-10
Psalms 15:2-5
Colossians 1:24-28
Luke 10:38-42

July 18, 2010
16th Sunday – Ordinary Time
Cycle “C”
Deacon Thomas McCarthy

Diakonia is Gut Wrenching

For three weeks the Gospel readings have covered all of Luke Chapter 10. **Last Sunday** the Good Samaritan Parable called us to become Christian neighbors by service to God and others in need. **Two week ago** Jesus sent 72 disciples ahead of him to prepare his way and proclaim the Kingdom of God. Jesus expects his disciples to serve, **not to be served** and the only reward he promises is **“your name in the book of Heaven”**.

Father Tyler’s and Father Kirby’s homilies had the same message. Their point was clear. **They must have each one of us in service, if the Parish of Christ the King is to fulfill the Mission it was created for. Our parish is very different** than the other parishes in the Diocese, which have large geographic boundaries. Our parish’s geographic boundary is just **the lot** this Church sets on and the **University of Montana Campus**. The Mission of this Parish is so important to the future of the souls in this parish and on the UM campus that we not only have two young priests, we also have 4 full time young Focus Missionaries assigned here and (added for good measure) one old Deacon.

The fruits at our parish this last year have been above and beyond significant: (to mention a few) 20 people, mostly students, came into the Church at Easter. The number of engaged students at the Parish has grown exponentially. We have three students in Seminary. (James and Riley)

Father Kirby and Father Tyler are the Shepherds of our parish. When you look at a real shepherd; he appears to be leading a large flock of sheep but he really is leading each sheep individually. **There just happens to be a lot of individual sheep following the shepherd.** This can be overwhelming without the shepherd’s family assistance in every aspect of carrying for and growing the flock.

The readings of Ordinary time are challenging and for many of us gut wrenching because after a 6 month Journey through the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, the Triduum, Easter and Pentecost. The focus moves to: **What is your response to all of this?** We still have 20 more weeks of challenging Ordinary Time readings calling us to respond to Christ and the mission he commissioned us to accomplish. Our only reward is **“your name in the book of Heaven”**.

The reading from Genesis today is about serving God. There is more than serving a meal to the Blessed Trinity taking place with Abraham’s and Sara’s separate and different roles. **It is about bringing forth God’s Chosen People through the combined efforts of God, Abraham and Sarah -- each one contributing in different but necessary roles resulting in the birth of Isaac. Change One- Remove One and Nothing Happens; together they make a great nation of which we are part.** We, by Baptism, are Children of Abraham and Sarah and we are members of God’s Chosen People. Our mission is to invite everyone to become one of the People of God and **we all have Individual but necessary roles to serve.**

Luke’s story of Martha and Mary is about different roles that create wholeness not competition. **Luke’s Church** was becoming more Gentile than Jewish, more urban than rural and more stable than itinerant. These changes created conflict and one of the changes was that common lay men and women were establishing, supporting, maintaining and serving the Church and were **indispensable in many ways.** The cultural norm for the religious role of men and women in the Roman/Greco and Jewish cultures were at times in conflict with the new Christian community’s culture regarding service.

Luke uses Martha and Mary, to bring this to his community. **Martha** is compatible with Jewish expectations and **Mary** is more compatible with the Roman/Greco culture. Both are appropriate and necessary. **What if Martha said: “Okay supper can just burn on the stove!” and sat down next to Mary or just walked out.** That is not Luke’s point. Luke is moving his community to change their hearts and minds and this will change the way they serve God and neighbor, moving from conflict to compatibility.

The Greek word for “Serve” that Luke was using is “Diakonia”; from it comes our words for Deacon and Diaconate. It meant table service as Martha was doing; but it also meant Apostolic Ministry, Teaching, Evangelizing, and caring for the Sick or Poor, **assisting the Church physically, financially and/or spiritually in any way. All were Diakonia.**

When Paul writes his letter his communities are also mixed Jewish and Gentile Christians. He has to deal with similar problems and his frustration is clear in many of his letters. **Frustration is usually caused by change and being self-focused:** One group wants a change; the other wants no change, or a different change. **No one likes change unless it serves their particular norms and personal interests.**

YET! Jesus came to make profound changes. He also came to create Reconciliation and Unity. Jesus wants us focused on changing ourselves so we can truly serve others. These personal changes are the first steps of progress and without them nothing will change. When someone starts to address **their personal barriers to serve**, they will experience a lot of emotions and feelings, and one of them will be **frustration** because it goes hand in hand with spiritual transformation and progress. **It is a gut wrenching process to move from wanting to be served to becoming someone that is serving.**
How can we each assist each other in this process?

The Church is the Body of Christ -- the People of God. **God's instrument of Reconciliation and Unity is Christ. Christ's instrument of Reconciliation and Unity is the Church. The Church's instrument of Reconciliation and Unity is every member of the Body of Christ; and that includes you and me.**

Paul described it in our second reading. "You fill up what is lacking --- for the sake of His body, the Church ---The mystery of Christ in you --Hoping to bring everyone to perfect completion in Christ." Every ministry or role that addresses what is lacking in the Church and in bringing everyone to perfect completion in Christ is Diakonia.

In Acts Chapter 6, Luke brings up the first community conflict between Roman/Greco and Jewish Christians over the distribution of food. To address this, the Apostles ordained seven men by praying over them and laying hands on them. The first Permanently Ordained Deacons to serve table for the Apostles -- to be an extension of the Apostles' ministry to the Church. That is what my ordained Diaconate is -- an extension of the Bishop of Helena' ministry to the Church.

You might think that you were not called to Diakonia but that is wrong thinking. The ministry of Diakonia existed long before the ordinations of any Deacon and it was not replaced by those first seven ordinations or any subsequent Deacon ordinations. **You Men, Women and Children are the continuing Diakonia.** When you were baptized and confirmed, it was your initiation into the very life of Christ and into the service and ministry of His Body the Church. **To use Paul's words again: "The mystery of Christ living in you -- to fill up what is lacking in His Body, the Church -- hoping to bring everyone to perfect completion in Christ."** You were initiated into the Diakonia in service to God and neighbor.

If Permanently Ordained Deacon and Diakonia are not the same- Then what is the difference? I serve as an extension of the Bishop of Helena's Diakonia. **So I serve the Church: How I am asked to, where I am asked to, and when I am asked to. That is the Permanently Ordained Deacon's Ministry.**

Your Diakonia calls you to serve the Church; How you choose to serve, Where you choose to serve, and When you choose to serve. There is no conflict but only compatibility between my Diaconate and your Diakonia. **There is no conflict about the fact that we are both called by Christ to serve. The only conflict is if one of us chooses not to serve.** There is no lack of ministries and needs for service. There is a need for everyone's particular abilities, skills and interests. **Our individual service**, although different, are all compatible but even more **they are all necessary.** **What is lacking in the Church** are not needs, not ministries but the Diakonia performing those ministries and filling those needs. **When any of us choose not to serve, then there is indeed something lacking in the Body of Christ -- the Church.**

We each must ask ourselves if something is lacking: Could it be me? Could it be my Diakonia that is lacking?

I remind you again if you are doing ministry, you are likely going to feel **gut wrenching emotions, and frustration** like Luke, Paul and Jesus did but don't be alarmed or give up or walk out; maybe it is telling you, that you are in the right place and doing the right thing. At least you know that you are in very good company.

When you serve, Christ's Presence is revealed **"in you"** to those being served and Christ's Presence is revealed **"to you"** in the ones you serve. Then **"what is lacking for the sake of His body, the Church is filled -- filled with the mystery of Christ in you hoping to bring everyone to perfect completion in Christ"**.

Christ the King's mission is then being fulfilled "by you" and "your name is in the book of Heaven"!