

HOMILY - 5th SUNDAY OF EASTER - A

There is an old cliché that says: *If you were accused of being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict you?* My teenage granddaughters tell me that the 21st century version of this is: *Could anyone tell that you are a Christian by looking at your face book page?*

Most weekdays my wife Kay and I attend a daily mass that is heavily populated by college students. Like all young people (and some others of us) they often show up wearing tee-shirts and sweat shirts boasting slogans, team emblems, logos and occasionally a bible verse.

About 2 weeks ago-- on one of the first warm days of the season--I saw a curious example of this personal signage when a young woman came into the chapel, before mass, and sat in front of me. It was a hot day and she was dressed for the heat with an outfit that bared her shoulders. One couldn't help noticing that on her right shoulder she sported a tattoo in bold, black letters. It read Philippians 4:13. These bold and permanently inked words definitely caught my eye and made me wonder just what Philippians 4:13 said. She had chosen to make a strong statement – one that definitely could not be hastily discarded with a change of heart or a change of clothes. In fact, she had chosen to carry a life-time advertisement of her beliefs. I wonder how many of us would be willing to wear our faith in such a visual way?

I'm not advocating tattoos but I couldn't help but think of that young woman's strong commitment to her beliefs, and her willingness to prominently wear them, when I read today's first reading about the early community of believers. The first Christians made a radical commitment, a bold and strong statement when they left their old life behind to follow Jesus.

It is not surprising that there were soon growing pains in their community --that before long this young and growing Christian community began to struggle and experience internal problems. Today's reading introduces us to a matter of justice involving 2 groups in the early community. They are identified by their background prior to conversion---the Hellenists, and the Hebrews. The Hellenists were Jews who had been born and lived for a time outside of Palestine. They spoke Greek and had synagogues of

their own where the Greek translation of Scripture was used. (On the other hand.) The Hebrews were Jews born in Palestine; they spoke Aramaic and used the Hebrew Bible in their synagogues. This difference in backgrounds naturally carried over into the Christian Community in the early years and caused some dis-connect as we hear in the 1st reading today. There are complaints from the Hellenists that their widows are not being taken care of in the same way as the Hebrew widows. Obviously, something needed to be done, but the Apostles were already stretched thin with preaching and spreading the Good News. Had Jesus chosen them to spend time dealing with the day-to-day affairs of his fledgling community? Obviously, they needed some middle-management people here. And so, 7 Good Men were chosen from the community to take on this servant role, to minister to the needs of the community. These 7 men are seen as the first deacons in the church and one of the diaconate charisms of the early community down to the present day is that of service.

In today's second reading, Peter writes to the fledgling communities of Asia Minor to inform and affirm them with the words: You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Nearly 2,000 years later, the Christian community survives and continues. We the members of the Christian community of St. Cecilia Parish have roots in that first community of believers. We may not live in community or pool our belongings and our money as they did, but we are still called to be a community that cares for one another, that ministers to one another, that meets each other's needs, that worships and praises God together. We are called to be good stewards-- to share our gifts and talents for the welfare of the larger community. We are not a group of separate individuals but a community united through the Eucharist. We are called to enable, to invite, to recognize, to support, to nurture, to evangelize. Recall the girl with the Philippians 4:13 tattoo. As a member of the St. Cecilia Community, if you were to wear a sign promoting your faith and beliefs, what would it say?

Deacon Gary Aitchison May 17-18, 2014