

**7 Easter – Year B – May 27, 2009 - Homily**  
**Acts 1:15-17, 21-26; Psalm 1; 1 John 5:9-13; John 17:6-19**  
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Organization and leadership were required from the earliest days of the new sect of Judaism, known as the Way, and later as Christianity. It appears that there have always been different roles and responsibilities within the community of faith, while understanding the equality and dignity of every member in God's sight. The Episcopal and Lutheran faith traditions are no different. For example, even as we recognize the Biblical truth of the priesthood of all believers, there are some in all faith traditions who are specifically called by God to ordained leadership. In our reading from the Book of Acts, we hear that only those who had been with Jesus from the beginning when John baptized Him in the River Jordan until the day of ascension were to be considered for the role of apostle. This is at least according to Luke's second book, his first being the Gospel of Luke. Later, of course, after his own conversion Paul would consider himself the least of the apostles, but an apostle nonetheless, despite his inability to claim that he was with Jesus from the beginning. In tonight's account from the Book of Acts, as Jesus once prayed, Peter has become a voice of leadership as first among the eleven remaining apostles. There are now only eleven apostles and a space in the leadership circle because of Judas' betrayal and suicide. Jesus first chose twelve, although he always knew that one would betray Him. Twelve is an important number throughout the Word, according to Scripture the twelve apostles are to rule the twelve tribes of Israel, and in the context of violent Roman oppression, the twelve tribes are especially concerned with the restoration of Israel.

We have to note that Peter's own style of leadership involved seeking the community's assistance to choose a replacement for Judas. The discernment is rightly conducted through prayer. The community comes together, and prays, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." The method of casting lots was an ancient practice amongst the Israelites. From our perspective, it is much more important to understand the process here as one in which God would provide the answer to their prayer, because God alone knows the hearts of the two candidates. The lot falls on Matthias, who becomes the new apostle of the Lord. This is the last mention we have of Matthias in the whole of the New Testament, and even in other writings his work of ministry is more legend than fact. Aside from this short passage when he is first chosen to become an apostle, the ministry of Matthias becomes quite anonymous.

Do you remember how you came to know and love Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Who first introduced you to Christ, to a community of faith, to our loving God? Do you remember their names? Or as the years have rolled by, are you more and more inclined to say that you've always known God and loved the Lord, and that there wasn't a single defining moment or person who brought you to Christ? Yet, even if our memory fails us, we know at least intellectually that we cannot have heard or known Jesus unless we had been taught about Him by someone at some time in our lives. I first heard about Jesus at home through a book that my Mom gave me on the life of our Lord, and also when we went to church. With polo mint bribes to keep me and my older siblings quiet -- you probably know them as LifeSavers -- I distinctly remember listening to the vicar's sermons. That was Fr. Carless. I attended the same high school as one of his daughters, and when Steve and I got married, it was Fr. Carless who presided at the ceremony, in the small church of my childhood.

I also learned a lot about God and faith from our neighbor, Dorothy, who was always Auntie Dorothy to me, at least while I was growing up. Dorothy is a devout Roman Catholic, and she lives her faith, especially through her prayers. I will always remember her kindness to my Mom, after my parents separated. Then there's Mrs. Sturgeon, one of my grade school teachers. She encouraged me to grow and develop my leadership skills. Under her care, I became a house captain, one of the team leaders for class projects, and I also ran the school tuck shop selling chips and snacks to the other children at morning break. All of this at the tender age of nine years old. It is these simple acts of faithful Christian living that changed who I am, and the course of my life forever. When I was much older, it was a Canadian singer, songwriter and evangelist called Eric who helped to bring me back to Christ after many years of going my own way. I know you have similar stories of family, friends, teachers, and strangers in your own life who have made a huge difference in your spiritual journey. There are millions and millions of relatively anonymous Christians who have shared their faith without fuss or fanfare for over two thousand years. Most of us would not be Christians without their witness. We can't all be as famous as Mother Teresa, Desmond Tutu, or the Archbishop of Canterbury, but we can all share our love for God by loving our neighbors as ourselves.

Andy Warhol thought that one day we would all enjoy fifteen minutes of fame. What do you think – have you had one of those moments in your life already, or are you still waiting? Perhaps you really don't care for that idea at all! If you could have a fleeting moment of fame, for what would you like to be remembered? Something you achieved in your working life, or family life? Or if you could, would you like to be a famous Christian, known for your work among the poor perhaps, or for something else related to living out your faith. Since I have had the advantage of time to think about these questions, I have to say that I have no interest at all in any kind of worldly fame. I only desire one thing, that when the Lord welcomes me home and examines my heart, I might hear these words, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave;" (Matthew 25:23). One of my favorite quotes speaks to how important it is that we celebrate the faithfulness of every single Christian, in the same way as we must each take seriously the call to discipleship, and the commandment to be witnesses to the Good News in Jesus Christ, our Lord. The quote comes from nineteenth century English scholar and theologian, Benjamin Jowett, who once said, "The way to get things done is not to mind who gets the credit for doing them." I like to think that every community of faith would welcome that ideal as a way of being and doing in the world! Think about this, if the Gospel had only ever been preached in words and deeds by the twelve apostles and their successors, where would the Body of Christ be today? Do you and I know what a difference we have made in the lives of others by our own witness of faith? You and I are not apostles, but by God's grace, we **are** disciples of our Lord, and we too can preach the Gospel every single day.

Amen.