

## St Mary's Concord

### A Reflection for the Fifth Sunday of Easter

*The readings for the Fifth Sunday of Easter (Year A): Acts 6:1-7; 1 Peter 2:4-9; John 14:1-12.*

*To contain the spread of the COVID-19 Pandemic all churches remain closed.*

*During the Easter Season, the first reading each Sunday is from the Acts of the Apostles. This Sunday I am changing the focus of my reflection from the Gospel to the first reading. Please take a few minutes to read Acts 6:1-7.*

**Sunday 10 May 2020 is also Mother's Day. Happy Mother's Day to all mothers. We pray for our mothers, living or dead.**

In his poem, *Mending Wall*, the American poet Robert Frost presents two people with different ideas about what it means to be a neighbour. Their properties are separated by a stone wall and each spring the two neighbours meet to repair the wall.

The narrator of the poem, one of the two, believes walls keep people apart and that nature works to collapse the walls and fences we build. The other neighbour keeps repeating a lesson he learned from his father: "good fences make good neighbours".

The wall serves no practical purpose and that causes Frost to reflect:

Before I build a wall I'd ask to know  
what I was walling in or walling out,  
and to whom I was like to give offence.

He wants to challenge his neighbour's view but the poem concludes:

He will not go behind his father's saying,  
and he likes having thought of it so well.  
He says again, "good fences make good neighbours".

We also need to be challenged when we accept too quickly the walls our society builds: walls of prejudice and mistrust, walls of privilege and injustice. Sometimes the walls have become so much a part of our society that we no longer see them as a barrier. We simply keep saying "good fences make good neighbours".

Over the past three Sundays the first reading has been from the *Acts of the Apostles* where Luke has been describing the life of the early Christian community in Jerusalem. They met in their homes to pray together and to share their food and they shared their goods in common.

It seems an idyllic scene but this Sunday's reading (Act 6:1-7) suggests that not everything was idyllic. There were two groups in the community, the Palestinian Jewish converts and converts from the Greek world, either Gentiles (non-Jews) or Jewish converts from outside of Palestine. The first group Luke calls the Hebrews and those from a Greek background are called the Hellenists.

The majority group in Jerusalem were the Hebrews and while it seems that there was no deliberate discrimination, they were giving preference to those in need within their own community and those in the Hellenist community were being overlooked.

We can presume that the discrimination happened because the two groups were different. They spoke different languages and came from different cultures. As often happens in human societies, a



breakdown of communication can lead to neglect and when neglect becomes entrenched it leads to injustice.

The Twelve, as the leaders of community, responded by calling for others to be appointed who would be responsible for the distribution of food to those in need. We could call it delegation, but it was more than that. The whole community was involved in the discernment and in the decision.

Sometimes we expect leaders to solve the problems for us and while leadership is important, we cannot step back and take no responsibility ourselves for the challenges we face. The message that we are all responsible for each other has been a recurring theme of the national response to COVID-19.

We know that Australians are generous and reach out to those in need when disasters hit: the drought, bush fires and floods. We also know that recovery takes time, but our attention quickly moves to other things.

One way that we can ensure that help continues to be given is to create structures that still provide support after the crisis has passed. All human societies, including the Church, require structures to give order to the life of a community. But the structures only work when they have the support of the community.

When the COVID-19 barriers do come down, how will we look back on these weeks and months? What have we learnt about our relationships with each other, with our family, our colleagues, our neighbours? As members of a faith community, what have we learnt about the journey of the Christian life?

Perhaps this “experience of absence” will prompt us to look again at some relationships that we have taken for granted. And, hopefully, it will also give us a renewed appreciation of the support we give to each other when we gather on Sundays to celebrate the Eucharist.

*Paul Crowley*  
*10 May 2020*