

Homily for May 22, 2011 (5th Sunday of Easter)
Acts 6:1-7; Psalm 33 (v.v.); 1 Peter 2:4-9; John 14:1-12

A Different Kind of “Band-Aid Solution”

Earle Dickson loved his new wife Josephine very much. She had a lot of gifts; but unfortunately cooking and housekeeping weren't among them. It wasn't that she didn't care or didn't try or even that she didn't do a good job. No, Josephine Dickson's biggest problem was that she was, well, a bit of a klutz. She was accident prone; and it pained her husband to sit down to dinner while his poor wife across from him was nursing an assortment of cuts, burns, and other wounds.

Now the easiest solution might have been to hire a cook or a maid. However, Earle and Josephine didn't have that kind of money. I suppose they could have switched roles, with Earle staying home to cook and clean; but it was 1920 in New Brunswick, New Jersey. That wasn't going to happen. They just had to find a way to help Josephine survive the travails of her klutzy cooking and cleaning.

Fortunately for the rest of us, Earle happened to be a salesman for a company called Johnson & Johnson. So one day he brought home some cotton gauze and adhesive bandages. He would place squares of gauze at particular intervals along the sticky side of the tape; so as his wife needed a bandage for a cut or scrape, she would just have to cut a strip of tape and gauze and apply it to the wound. Thus the Band-Aid® was born.

It took a few years to perfect the idea—the first Band-Aids, 3 inches wide and 18 inches long, didn't sell too well—but with refinements and mass production, they soon became popular. By 2001 over 100 *billion* Band-Aids had been sold. In this case necessity was surely the mother of invention, one that was the original “Band-Aid solution.” However, unlike our conventional associations with the term (which generally denote a superficial solution to a serious problem), it has improved the lives of people throughout the world...and it has made a lot of money for J & J!

Our first reading recalls another kind of “Band-Aid solution,” one which called for a different kind of creativity in response to different kind of need that was just as real. The community of disciples, the church, was growing rapidly; and “the Hellenists (likely Jews who spoke only Greek) complained against the Hebrews (those who spoke Aramaic, Hebrew and perhaps some Greek) because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.”

In an era where widows were largely dependent on relatives or charity to survive, this kind of discrimination or neglect was serious business. It went against the very gospel of inclusion, justice, and compassion that Jesus preached. In response the leaders of the community, the Twelve, created a new ministry and invited the community to call forth those who, “filled with the Spirit and wisdom,” could carry it out. Then the Twelve commissioned them for that work.

This same process has been followed by the church through the centuries:

- A **Care** or need is identified and gives rise to
- A **Call** or vocation coming from
- A **Community** of faith, leading to
- A **Commission**, by those who have been entrusted to serve as leaders, for
- A **Continuation** of the church’s mission, according to the signs and needs of the times and the needs of those whom the church is called to serve.

It’s interesting to note, too, that these ministries themselves evolve over time to meet the needs of the church. Luke used the Greek word *diakonia* or “service” to describe what Stephen, Philip and the other five chosen for the task of overseeing the daily distribution of bread. However, in the remainder of Acts, there is no other mention of this particular work; and when Stephen and Philip are mentioned later, they are found to be preaching and evangelizing! Indeed, the roles of what we know as deacons would continue to evolve to include service at the Eucharistic table as well as proclaiming God’s word in the liturgy, along with other service.

Where there’s a need, God makes a way; and God wants and needs all of us to help. In our second reading, Peter urges us to present ourselves to God as living stones, “rejected by human beings but *chosen and precious in the sight of God;*” and he further exhorts us: “let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” That’s what we call the “priesthood of all believers,” and it is a vocation drawn from the waters of baptism. That spiritual house is, of course, the church; but it’s also our own homes, what we call “the domestic church.” It can also be the places where we work, play, relax—wherever we find ourselves.

Jesus has made a place for all of us. As he reminds us in the gospel reading: “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.” He also assures us: “whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater works than these....” That’s an awesome and scary thought! But we need not be anxious. The Lord doesn’t require miracles from us; but he could always use a few Band-Aids. +