

May 2, 2021 – [Fifth Sunday of Easter](#)

Acts 9:26-31

Psalm 22:26-27, 28, 30, 31-32

1 Jn 3:18-24

Jn 15:1-8

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"When Saul arrived in Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple....He also spoke and debated with the Hellenists, but they tried to kill him. And when the brother learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him on his way to Tarsus." Acts of the Apostles 9: 26, 29-30

The interpersonal dynamics between Saul (Paul) and the rest of the disciples, Barnabas and the rest of the disciples, and Paul and the people of Jerusalem read like a roller coaster of suspicion and approval. All of the scriptures for the **Fifth Sunday of Easter** are thought provoking, but I find the First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles to be especially challenging.

I once began a new ministry in which I could easily rest upon my religious affiliation for immediate trust and credibility. My first day on the job, I asked for a key to the building and was directed to an administrative assistant's office. As I explained my request, she fumbled into her desk and pulled out an extra key. It was that easy--no paperwork, no background check, no nothing! To this day, I humorously share the story with others. Unlike Paul in the First Reading, I had nothing to prove before being accepted and trusted.

Years later, I began to participate in some of my community's local advocacy meetings. I knew many in attendance, but the meeting chair was new to me. He seemed to have a lot of energy, organizational skill, and moxie. But because I did not know the chair from my previous involvements in the same community, and he did not appear to have a recognized organizational affiliation behind him, I was suspicious.

"Who is this guy?"

"What's in it for him?"

"Whom does he represent?"

"Does he belong to a local faith community?"

I was guilty of being overly suspicious of another person serving in justice and outreach, not unlike the first disciples of Jesus who were suspicious of Paul.

I ask you to consider, are there times in your parish, school or religious community in which a new parishioner, staffer, student or member (especially someone who was of a different generation, race, ethnicity, educational background or sexual orientation) was discounted, ignored, or disregarded simply because he or she was different or appeared untested?

Despite several references to Paul being challenged or disregarded, at the end of the First Reading, Luke writes (Acts of the Apostles 9: 31), "The church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria was at peace...." I am perplexed that the same Church that was threatened by a fresh voice and perspective was described as "at peace"!

Are we truly at peace when we know there are people in our midst being discounted, ignored, or disregarded? As we reflect on today's reading, let's consider actions we can undertake that will make us as people, as Church, and as children of God, more inclusive, loving, and compassionate, so we can find that peace.

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