

Barbara Sullivan – Mission Reflection

When I first read this Scripture passage I noted that the early Christians seemed to have a somewhat idyllic life. They were so alive in their actions and in their faith. These people shared their possessions, and were helpful, compassionate, and kind to each other and to their community. They were in awe of Jesus! They wanted to learn everything about him. They ate together, praised the Lord, and the Scripture says their numbers grew and they enjoyed favor with all people. That is a pretty remarkable setting. It sounds something like the perfect community.

After I read this passage I started thinking about community in a different way. Whether we live alone or with twenty people we are still part of a community. It might be our family, neighborhood, work, church or prayer group. When I'm at Mass, I believe if I asked someone to pray for me, and even if they didn't know me, they would pray for me because we have the bond of a church community, and we know the power of prayer. We pray for the sick, for those who are receiving sacraments, and we pray for the repose of the souls of those who have died. It's such a wonderful thing, and I thank God we can do this. It is part of our Mass and part of our Catholic tradition. Not only is it comforting and special to the individual, but it is also being part of our church community, and the effect is widespread.

Where do I see myself in this story or in the parish? I have been a member of St. Ann's parish for about ten years. I wasn't always active in the parish, but I always went to Mass, and have been aware of the opportunities here for prayer and communion. About eight years ago, my husband, Bob, was seriously ill for a long time. I remember that Msgr. Deeley would visit him quite often at home and at the hospital and bring him communion. They would pray and discuss issues of faith. My husband looked forward to his calls, and would write questions for him to answer. Those visits made a huge difference in Bob's life, and as I watched my husband's faith deepened, I, too, was touched by the power of prayer and moved by a sense of caring. After he died I remembered that the Legion of Mary called me and told me that they said a Rosary for him. Also, someone I didn't know at the time brought me a plant, a gift from the parish. I was quite touched by all of this because people took the time to pray for him and me, people who did not even know us! As I look back on that difficult time, I am indeed grateful for those prayers that helped me feel the presence of God.

For the past few years I have been part of an Arise community as a host and facilitator as well as a participant. This has been a real grace. I only knew one person in the group when we first started, and most of us were strangers to each other. However, every week we shared a little about our faith and ourselves, and gradually we became more comfortable with each other and developed a feeling of trust. We prayed for each other and each other's needs. Each week we told how God was working in our lives, and we shared our burdens as well as our blessings. We saw the ripple effect of our prayers as some were answered in extraordinary ways. We were becoming a faith community. We praised God with our singing and discussed the Scripture readings for the week. The group was very social, and we always had food and coffee and tea at every meeting. We enjoyed each other's company. At the end of each six week Arise session, we

would have a potluck dinner. I guess you could say we were something like the early church.

How did this affect me? I was humbled by the experience. My own faith became stronger as I saw in each one of them a piece of the Catholic Church as they shared their faith and myriad of insights. Each week I discovered something in them and in myself. I saw their love of God and faith in action as they told of services they had done for people in the community of Quincy and elsewhere. I learned about them as individuals and discovered a holiness in each one of them. We prayed for each other, and I couldn't help but deepen my own spiritual life. Being part of an Arise group was a joyful experience. I became energized! I looked forward to the meetings, I felt God's blessings upon them and upon me. I witnessed the power of prayer. I prayed before the meetings, and I know the people in the parishes and throughout the Archdiocese prayed for the success of Arise. From my point of view those prayers were answered, and for this I say, "Thank you."

God is so good, and God has given all of us many gifts to our community and to ourselves. We have been given the gift of church, and we have been given many individual gifts as well. One of the gifts given to me was the gift of hospitality. I like to socialize, and it was a pleasure to host an Arise group in my home. It was fun, but little did I know the blessings or the impact that would come from it. Our group bonded so well that currently, we are doing a Bible study because we wanted to continue our faith sharing and our friendships. Of course, I ask you for your prayers of support, for it is a wonderful way to know we are part of a church community.

In conclusion I ask you now to take some time to prayerfully consider your gifts and prayerfully consider how God is calling you to engage in the life of a parish community. Thank you and God bless you.