

The people of Raytown faced a significant issue in elections this month, whether or not to pass a new city charter. Two local newspapers took opposing views; leaders and citizens entered the debate. In the end the charter did not pass, and even some of the proponents admit that the loss has helped them clarify some issues. What's great is that it brought Raytown into an important discussion about its identity. Who are we? What shall we become? How shall we get there? Will we be turning back on our past? Those are excellent questions for organizations, families, and individuals.

Those questions faced the first Christians. In a sense, the apostles were presenting the community with a new charter, the resurrection. If the apostles were to succeed, they had to convince people that what they proposed was not a complete change but a new growth in their belief. Today's first reading captures an address by Peter on this topic. He starts with a very clever statement for his Jewish audience. He says, "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus." Do you hear what he's doing? He says the same God who revealed himself to their ancestors--that same God has glorified Jesus. Resurrection is new, but God is old; nothing has changed about God; this is growth. Christianity would not be change for the sake of change, but something new which preserved the heart of what was old.

Our church strives to face new situations in a way which is consistent with what we believe. Sometimes people will ask "What does the Bible say about abortion, homosexuality, artificial insemination, or the cloning of human beings?" Well, the Bible doesn't give a thorough presentation on many of our contemporary issues for the simple reason that they weren't pressing at the time. But what the Bible does give us is the core of our belief; it teaches what we have to hang on to if we want to be faithful. Peter's speech in today's first reading is an excellent example. He preaches that God has glorified Jesus, and if we repent from our sins we can be forgiven. From statements like that our church develops its entire tradition of beliefs. Sometimes we disagree within the church, and that gets scary to people. But there's always a core belief that does not change. Every Sunday we recite the creed together to reassure us that these principal beliefs are sacred in the church throughout the world and throughout every age.

Families also experience disagreement. People honor birthdays in different ways, or they pursue different relationships and jobs. Families can tolerate diversity until a core belief is attacked; then it's important to state again what's our creed as a family; what do we hold that will never change.

We're like leaves on a bush. We see other leaves of a different size or color, which reflect sunlight in a different way, and we get frightened. Sometimes we can't see where these leaves connect. We focus on the difference more than the relationship. Peter's skillful presentation to the first converts to Christianity managed to show them the center, the stalk which will hold all the branches together. As long as the stalk is there, we can tolerate diversity because of the unity which is ours.