

The phone rang one afternoon in the rectory where I was working at the time. The voice was excited: "Father, this is Ric. I've just completed the training to become a Eucharistic minister." The pastor, with the assurance of other parishioners, recommended him to the diocese to be prepared for communion ministry. I was happy for him, and delighted with how joyfully he announced the news. I paused for a moment on my end of the line, which prompted Ric to ask, "What do I do now?" I replied, "Sell everything you own and give the money to the poor." He asked, "Is there some other ministry I could get into?"

There are times in life when we reach a threshold in our service to God, to our families, or to work. They are scary moments because we don't know what the future will bring, and because they are rare moments in which God takes particular interest in our lives. But how do we know where to go next?

Today's first reading is a slice of the Church's history. The story is striking, I think, because several groups of people reach a threshold in their lives all at once. It could have been scary, it could have been divisive, but instead it became the sunlight which gave direction to the Church's growth.

Here's the story: Among the Christians there were two groups--One spoke Hebrew, the other Greek. Those who spoke Greek noticed that the widows in their group were getting less to eat than the Hebrew-speaking widows. It looked like the converts from Judaism thought they were better. So those who spoke Greek accused the apostles of being prejudiced.

This must have been a tremendous affront to the apostles, but they answered it in a surprising way. They agreed that it was wrong to share food unequally, but in reflecting on the situation, they said that's really not the heart of the problem. The real issue is that we have too much to do. If this is to be a church we can't do it all alone, we need help to do charity.

Then, not only did they share their ministry of charity, they also shared the ministry of governance. They let the people choose who the 7 assistants would be. Seven were chosen for their spirituality and prudence to assist in works of charity. It was the birth of the diaconate, and the beginning of shared ministry in the Church. We've been working it out ever since.

In this story, several people cross a threshold: The Greek-speaking Christians accuse their leaders of injustice. The apostles relinquish some of their work. The people choose their leaders. And seven of them step forward to accept new work in the Church. In each case what gave them courage was their sincere concern not for themselves, but for their community.

It's scary to cross a threshold: Some people feel content with what little they do. Some do too much and are afraid to relinquish the power they have even when it would free themselves up while encouraging the participation of others. It's scary because we're content with the present, the future is unknown, and because a threshold is a place where we meet God.

My sisters and brothers facing decisions about the future we stand at a moment in time in which the Holy Spirit takes particular interest in us. What fear we have is not that God is absent--it's that God is there. He will accompany us if our love for others gives us the courage to step forward. Regis E5 17.v.87