

Father O'Connor's Homily for 3 May 2026
Fifth Sunday of Easter – A

Acts of the Apostles 6: 1-7
1 Peter 2: 4-9
John 14: 1-12

“Tell us about the olden days.” That was a request that many of the grandchildren in our family – including me – made of Grandma and Grandpa O'Connor [Grandma Gert and Grandpa Jim]. “What was it like when you were growing up? Tell us about the olden days.”

Then we would hear their stories. Grandpa would tell us about when he was little and went ice skating in Grafton and the ice broke. He ended up in the cold water, and Uncle Tom Washington rescued Grandpa, took him to the pump house, and set him in front of the roaring fireplace to warm up.

Grandma Gert would tell us stories like this one about her younger sister, Mildred. They shared a double bed and Grandma, a prankster, would reach across the headboard of the bed and rap on Mildred's side. Then Mildred would be the one in trouble for making noise after the lights were out.

Grandma was born in 1902. That was one hundred and twenty-four years ago, and kids today think that they invented teasing their siblings! It's been around a long time – since the olden days!

Before Grandpa died in 1991 – shortly before he turned 90 – he used to say to me: “Is there anything that you want to ask me? Is there anything that you want to know about? Because you are the oldest grandchild and, after I'm gone, you are going to have to tell the family stories.”

I am sure that you have family stories too. Some of them, no doubt, are humorous, some describe deeds of courage, and others pass on great wisdom. Some may be about a tragedy, or something that was hurtful, or a reconciliation that took place. We pass on the stories of our families. Sometimes we even put them down in writing.

Grandma's sister, Aunt Mildred, loved doing that. She would do her research on the family history, but whenever she came across something that did not meet with her approval, she would leave that part out. Aunt Mildred's family history account was very dull – you'd think that everyone and everything was absolutely perfect, all the time!

Grandma Gert didn't like that approach, so she did some research of her own. And in her account of the family history we had outlaws and horse thieves and even a few pirates! Now, whether it was all true, we never questioned. But, believe me, we all liked to hear Grandma's version of the family history a whole lot better than Aunt Mildred's!

I tell you this today because that is what Acts of the Apostles is like – our First Reading. Acts of the Apostles is a New Testament book of the Bible that was written by Saint Luke. Jesus had died, He rose from the dead and He ascended into heaven. So Acts of the Apostles tells about what it was like “in the olden days,” at the beginnings of the Church.

The opening chapters of the Book of Acts sound style-wise a bit like Aunt Mildred's version of the family history. Everything was bright and beautiful in chapter 2. [*“Where seldom is heard a discouraging word, and the skies are not cloudy all day.”*] The first Christians “devoted themselves to the teaching of the Apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread [the Mass] and to the prayers” [Acts 2: 42]. Everyone shared a portion of what they had been blessed with, and everyone received what they needed.

We try to live that same message today. It's called “the stewardship way of life.”

But today's reading from Acts of the Apostles is from chapter 6. The Christian community was growing, and in today's passage we have something that sounds like Grandma Gert's version of the family history: there is a contentious situation going on that needed a solution.

There were Jews called Hebrews who had become Christians. And there were Greeks called Hellenists who had become Christians. And there were a lot of widows in these two groups. The Church felt the responsibility to care for widows and, in return, expected the widows' prayers and cooperation.

Well, the Greek-speaking widows [Hellenists] looked at the Hebrew widows [who spoke Aramaic rather than Greek], and they felt that the Hebrew widows were getting the lion's share of the food and the attention. And the Hebrew widows thought that they were entitled to preferential treatment. The discussion grew intense, and I like to imagine that it got very loud! And so the Apostles had to figure out what to do.

They prayed to the Holy Spirit. Then they selected seven men from the company of Christians, and the Apostles laid hands upon them, and these

seven were the first deacons in the life of the Church. Deacon means “one who is committed to service.” The first job of these deacons was to care for the widows – the Hebrew widows and the Greek widows. That’s how the diaconate began “in the olden days,” at the beginnings of the Church.

Jesus tells us in the Gospel today, “I am the Way, and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” He teaches us the story of our salvation. Since we have been redeemed by Jesus, we have a story to learn, we have a story to live by, and we have a story to tell.

As followers of Jesus, we are to become the living Gospel for everyone to hear.

Here is a practical application: I would recommend that the next time that you pick up your Bible – and I hope this is very soon – or the next time you come to Mass, just before the Scriptures are read, say to the Lord, “Lord, tell me about the olden days.”

And then let Him say to you, “Is there anything that you want to ask Me? Is there anything that you want to know about? Because now that I have ascended to heaven I am depending upon you to tell the story of My family – of your family – the Church, to everyone who will listen.”

“Lord, tell us about the olden days. And may you be in our hearts and on our lips that we may proclaim your Gospel worthily and well.”