Reflections from Fr. Dan -

First, I want to wish all our mothers a very happy Mother's Day. You are very special to us and, in my case anyway, I didn’t express that often enough.

In our first reading today, we get a glimpse of life in the first "parish" - in Jerusalem, soon after the Resurrection. Three characteristics stand out, which can help us reflect on our own Christian identity even today.

First, the community of believers is steadily growing. The Church is a living body of believers in Christ, and living things are meant to grow. If a community of Christians isn't growing, something is wrong; ours is a missionary religion. Christ sent his Apostles to preach his Word to all people; the Church is meant to spread into every corner of time and space.

Second, there is a clear structure of authority in the Church community. The Twelve Apostles are its leaders, as Jesus intended, and they solve the new problem that arises by ordaining the first Deacons. Today as well, every Catholic community is organized with the same hierarchical structure. First, there is the pope, the successor St Peter, leader of the Twelve Apostles. Then there is the local bishop, the successor of those Apostles. Then there is the pastor of the parish, the bishop's representative for a specific area. None of them govern by their own authority; they receive their authority from Christ, through the sacrament of orders.

Finally, even at the very beginning of the Church, we see that there are disagreements among believers. The Greek-speaking believers complained about being treated as second-class Christians. This is the point I would like to focus on today.

Our faith in Christ doesn't make us perfect right away, just as it didn't make the first Christians perfect right away. Spiritual growth is a life-long process. The first Christians had to work through conflicts and selfish tendencies; so do we all.

Growing in Christian maturity, both as individuals and as a community, is hard work, and it lasts our whole life long. God assists us with his grace, but he doesn't do it all for us. It's like being an artist. God gives artists the gift of artistic talent, but the artist has to take responsibility for developing it, and that is hard painstaking work. But since the vocation of the artist is to make beautiful things, and since beauty can never be exhausted, true artists never stop this process of development.

Michelangelo worked on the Dome of St Peter's Basilica in Rome nonstop for the last twenty years of his life, from age 68 to 88, when most people are relaxing in retirement. When he was in his late eighties, he allowed younger artists to assist him in his sculpture studio, something he never permitted in his earlier years. Though he was an old man, when he got out his hammer and chisel he worked so furiously that he would finish more in a few hours than his assistants were able to do in a week. They said that sometimes as he worked, even in his 80s, the speed...
and passion with which he chiseled and carved his marble blocks would make it look as if it were snowing inside the studio. That's what being a Christian is like. We are called to keep sculpting Christ's image in our souls our whole life long.

Our lives are living works of art. Christ is infinite wisdom, goodness, and courage. We, on the other hand, are fallen and finite, so there will always be more to do in our efforts to follow Christ and become like him, more blocks of marble in our lives and community, that we need to chisel into works of art that give glory to God.

Becoming a mature Christian is a life-long process, both for us as individuals, and for us as a Christian community. If we persevere in this process, never giving up and never falling into a dull routine, we will gradually, but steadily, grow in wisdom, courage, joy, and holiness. That is what our hearts thirst for.

One key ingredient that will help us persevere is the virtue of patience. Patience is not a popular virtue in today's culture. Today's culture wants everything right away. Even we Christians are trained in this cultural impatience. We want life to be like a movie, in which world champions are made in only two hours. We want life to be like UPS, which delivers whatever we want overnight. We want life to be like high-speed Internet, instant availability of everything from friends to financial updates. But the spiritual life isn't like that.

Becoming a mature Christian, and becoming a mature Christian community, takes constant effort over time. That's patience. God's grace is like sunlight and rain, and our souls are like gardens. Patience is the gardener who goes out every day, rain or shine, to pull out the weeds, fertilize the soil, mend the fences, and prune the plants. How foolish that gardener would be to give up on his garden before the harvest season! To expect full-grown and ripe tomatoes just days after the plants are put in the ground. And how foolish we are when we give up on ourselves or other people, saying that we can't change, long before the autumn of life!

Jesus never gives up on us, as he will prove once again by giving himself to us in this Mass. When he does, let's ask him to teach our hearts the precious virtue of patience, patience with ourselves, and patience with others.

On this Mother’s Day, let us offer this blessing to our Mothers:

“Loving God, as a mother gives life and nourishment to her children, so you watch over your Church. Bless all women, that they may be strengthened as Christian mothers. Let the example of their faith and love shine forth. Grant that we, their sons and daughters, may honor them always with a spirit of profound respect.

Grant this through Christ our Lord.”

Amen.