

**Homily by Bishop Edgar M. da Cunha**  
**Auxiliary Bishop of Newark**  
**Catholic Cultural Diversity Network Convocation**  
**Saturday of the Fifth Week of Easter**  
**May 8, 2010**

In our first reading from Acts 16:1-10 Luke tells us that the apostles decided that gentiles need not be circumcised or follow Jewish law and that, as a result, **“the churches grew stronger in faith and increased in number.”** What better result could we hope for, what else could we want? But what can we do today to make our “Church grow in faith and increase in number”? We need to imitate the action of the apostles and welcome all into the fold of God’s people.

In contrast to the attitude of the apostles was the way African slaves were treated. Tens of thousands of them were captured and sold for labor in the New World from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Before they were hauled into the ships, they were required to go through a ritual where they were stripped naked and had to go around the “Tree of Forgetfulness.” Men went around it nine times and women and children seven times. After that they went through the “Gate of No Return”. This ritual was meant to have them forget who they were, their background, their traditions, customs, religion, and all they were. It was like reformatting your hard drive. Huge efforts were made to cut them off from their past, but they failed. The “Tree of Forgetfulness” did not work. They could take the slaves out of Africa but they could never take Africa out of the slaves.

We can take people out of their land, their home, their country, but we cannot take these vital memories and roots out of them. So, we might as well embrace them with their uniqueness, their differences, their language, their culture, and tradition. That is the way the Church is going to **“grow stronger in faith and increase in number.”**

We know that uniformity is not possible and it shouldn’t even be desired. So, our effort is not for uniformity but for unity. We all remember the song from Carry Landry: “There is a time for building bridges and that time is NOW. Take our hearts, Lord, take our minds, take our hands and make them ONE.” We know how difficult this task is, but we must never stop praying for it and working on it.

We know we can catch more flies with one drop of honey than with a barrel of vinegar. Unfortunately when some of the people knock on the doors of our churches they are given vinegar. We want to serve them honey.