

## Second Sunday of Easter (B)

April 15, 2012

In the very first sentence in the very first reading, St. Luke is speaking of the earliest days of our church. “The whole multitude of those who believed was of one heart and mind.” I’m preaching on that single sentence today. Luke tells us what that unity means in concrete, day-to-day living. “They continued to devote themselves to the teaching of the apostles, to a communal form of life, to the breaking of the bread, and to the prayers.” Luke adds a fascinating feature of church life in Jerusalem. “There was never a needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of what was sold, and lay them at the feet of the apostles; and it was distributed to each according to one’s need.”

Is this an accurate picture of life in the early Christian church? Probably not. Luke’s picture is an ideal. Still, the ideal is important, for it reveals what the Lord expects of his disciples. Jesus prayed in his Last Discourse for the disciples: “I pray... that they all may be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be one in us.... Thus the world may come to know that you sent me and that you loved them even as you loved me.”

Such is the ideal. Let me touch briefly on the reality. First, “the teaching of the apostles” as it has developed through almost 2000 years. Much as we Catholics respect what we are taught, we are divided on a number of issues: from gay marriage to the ordination of women, from papal authority to justice and injustice within the church itself. These overshadow a range of other public issues: jobs and just wages, immigration, affordable health care. Second, such differences inevitably affect our life in community. When we feel fiercely about something, tempers flare up, friendships are fractured, words become weapons – even among Catholics. Third, the Eucharist and common prayer. What concerns me, only about 30 percent of American Catholics share the Eucharist at least two Sundays a month, the most powerful source of grace and unity within the church.

A homily is hardly the place to solve profound problems. But each one of us would do well to go back to the sentence in Acts that shaped this sermon: The followers of Jesus “continued to devote themselves to the teaching of the apostles, to a community form of life, to the breaking of the bread, and to the prayers.” Focus on that sentence as the risen Christ’s Easter gift to us. His gift is here for us at this very Mass: the faith we proclaim, our life in communion, Christ within us, and in just a moment our prayer for the sick and elderly among us.

Let me stress the gift itself. In the striking language of poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, “Let Christ easter in us.” Easter becomes a way of life, a life of joy in the Lord, joy in ourselves, joy in all the others, joy in the world. Yes, indeed, my risen sisters and brothers, let the gift of Christ easter within us!

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