

### 03 May 2020—The 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter: Acts 2:42-47

*They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42)*

This is the earliest description of the Church. Being devoted to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, devoted to the breaking of bread, devoted to the prayers—this is not merely about the Jerusalem Church long ago. This is the way, from the beginning, that Christians live, tools for building one's life on Christ. This is life God intends for all Christians, in opposition to the spirit of the times.

Every "age"—every generation—has values, expectations, demands, ways of understanding the world—that are enormously influential, yet unspoken and unexamined. A trivial example: families today think nothing of having 2 or more vehicles, yet 60 years ago it would have been considered extravagant.

What is the "spirit" of this age? The current age is best understood as a culture of narcissism, that infects us all regardless of age, social background, class or other factors. The formal definition says narcissism is: "excessive interest in one's own appearance, comfort, importance, abilities, etc." The Church is not immune. In a religious context narcissism is expressed in the assumption that each person is the sole judge for themselves of what is and is not the Christian faith, practice, morality, worship, and truth. That may sound good to some, but unfortunately this is contrary to the Scriptures and the Tradition of the Church. Paul writes (1 C 6:20): *For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's;* and (2 C 5:15), *Christ died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again; and again, it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...* (G 2:20); and yet again, *For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself...if we live, we live to the Lord...if we die, we die to the Lord...whether we live or die, we are the Lord's* (Ro 14:7,8). We are not called to the rapture of our own reflections. We are to be devoted to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers.

Devotion is loyalty, faithfulness, deep affection. Everyone is devoted to something. The question is, to whom or what is a person devoted? Is there not a vast difference between finding meaning in oneself and finding meaning and purpose in Christ: in the Bible, in the historic Faith and unbroken tradition of the Church.

Early Christians, and many Christians through the ages, were devoted to something quite specific. They were devoted to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship. The earliest Christians received the truth of Christ from Christ himself and through the Holy Spirit powerfully at work in and among them shared the Faith. They did not *find* or *devise* it from available evidence or *infer* it from logical deductions; they received and passed it on. Likewise, we are to receive the Truth of Christ through the New Testament, and through the Church's historic Faith; as the Apostles we are to make it intelligible, so that all may come. Our part is being open and willing to receive. Therefore, prayer and study are central in our devotion to Christ.

They were devoted to the Apostles' fellowship. We receive the truth of Christ in fellowship: we are not lone rangers; the revelation of God in Christ is not to a collection of individuals, but to a community that bears His Name.

We are to be devoted to the breaking of bread. In Greek, the definite article is just that; it points us to something definite. *The* breaking of bread is specific: the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. From earliest times, the Holy Eucharist is the principle act of Christian worship, the ultimate liturgical expression of faith in Jesus Christ. Here, too, we receive the Holy Body and Precious Blood of Jesus, and in the mystery of the Sacrament are fed, renewed, strengthened so that we might grow in faith and devotion, and worthily serve the world in Jesus' Name.

We are to be devoted to *the* prayers. Again, the definite article. All prayer is beneficial; yet there is special value in the corporate prayer of the Church. We receive the prayer life of the Church as much as we receive Truth through the Bible, the Church, the Eucharist. Through participation in and devotion to the historic prayers of the Church we learn how to pray, we are formed and strengthened to serve Jesus Christ. Why should we ignore the experience and wisdom of Christians who have already fought the good fight and run the race? Why should we not be open to and receive and make our own prayers and songs and words which have assisted millions of others?

Will it be the "spirit" of this age or the Truth of Jesus Christ? This is, has been and always will be the daily and lifetime question we face. May we run on the path of devotion to Christ. Amen.