

Easter 2

The first sentence of our first reading for this second Sunday of Easter, now dedicated to the celebration of God's mercy, taught us the following: "The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common" (4:32). Such is the idealized community which the author of the Acts of the Apostles would have us believe existed among the first followers of Christ. Do we believe that? It must have been true for some early Christian communities, though not all. We know, for example, that Paul faults members of the community living in Corinth, a community he founded, for not sharing their meal with others when they gathered to break bread, that is, when they gathered for the Eucharist which at this time took place within the context of an actual meal. He writes in his first Letter to them (11:22): "When you meet in one place, then, it is not to eat the Lord's supper, for in eating, each one goes ahead with his own supper, and one goes hungry while another gets drunk." That, Paul says, is not what your gatherings should be like. You should be sharing what you have since you are all called to share the Lord's own body and blood.

There is also another incident in Acts which contradicts today's reading but in doing so reveals what the ideal should be, namely, that all things should be shared in common. It is the story of a couple named Ananias and his wife Sapphira in Acts 5:1-6. They sold a piece of property and then presented the money to the apostles. But not all of it. They kept some of the money for themselves and did so secretly. That is, they pretended that they were giving all of the money they had gained in the sale but they didn't.

The point here is their lying. They could have retained the money from the sale of their property. So it would not have been held in common. So not quite the ideal described in our first reading today. But they should not have pretended to adhere to this ideal. That was their undoing.

As you well know, down through the centuries, Christians have attempted to live this ideal by taking what came to be called a vow of poverty. This vow did not mean that those who took it would be homeless and hungry, but it did mean that they would share whatever they had with other members of their community. This continues even today. Men and women continue to take vows of

poverty, which means that they share their homes and possessions with each other.

To say all this most simply, sharing is native to Christian living. Or, to put in concrete terms, Christians try to live the Lord's parable about the Good Samaritan. Unlike the priest and the levite, the good Samaritan (a Samaritan was half-Jew, half-Gentile, and therefore despised by those fully Jewish) did not pass by the stranger who had been robbed and beaten and lay by the side of the road. When the priest and levite saw him, they crossed the road to the other side in order to avoid him. But the Samaritan stops and care for him. It costs him time and money but he is willing to use his time and money in this way because he sees himself in this wounded man.

Today we celebrate Mercy Sunday. Could we not say that in celebrating the Lord's mercy we are applying the Lord's parable to God himself? God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are like the Good Samaritan. They see the human race in terrible straits and they don't run to the other side of the street so as to avoid us but rather run to us to help us. That is what my Father is like, Jesus is telling us when he tells us this parable. So go and

do likewise. Have mercy on each other. Share what you have with others who lack what you have.

Pope Francis sees mercy as the main characteristic of God. That is why he sees the church as a hospital which ministers to the needs of a sick world. The church is wealthy with the wealth of the merciful God. Therefore it must expend its wealth on the world God loves and wishes to heal. For the church not to do so would be to be untrue to its very nature. For us as individual Christians not to act in this way is a denial of our Christian identity.

Given this understanding of God and ourselves as the Body of Christ, we cannot be anything but critical towards those who advise us to be selfish and self-centered. Say all we want about our country's right to protect its borders, we cannot deny the fact that we must meet with compassion and concern those who are fleeing their countries because of corruption and violence. Yes, their own countries should care for them, and, yes, in not doing so they are inflicting their problems on us. But even that fact does not allow us to behave in an unchristian way. That man in the Lord's parable was wrong in walking on that dangerous street alone. He got what he deserved, we could say. Yet, there he is, and he must be helped, and we are the ones who can do so.

May the mercy of God and the Lord Jesus take hold of our minds and hearts so that we may act in a Christian way as we confront the people in our country and on our borders who need our help!