

Homily For Tuesday of the Second Week of Easter - Year I

St Peter's 8:30am Mass- April 30, 2019

Acts 4: 32-37 "The whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul."

Psalm 93 "The Lord is king. He is robed in majesty."

John 3: 7-15 "The Son of Man must be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

One Heart and One Soul

Introduction

Nowhere! That's a utopia, an ideal society that can sort of be imagined but can't really exist. It's been tried. The military enforced peace of Rome, the so called Pax Romana, was one version. Communist Russia, after the Bolshevik revolution, was a grand experiment in a peaceful community. Follow on down to the hippie communes of the 1960s, based on 'peace' and 'back to the land'. They all had something, a desire for a working community based on a unifying principle.

The Real Basis Community

Yet Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit had made it happen, almost overnight, without anyone, without any human person or group even imagining such a community, or coming up with a blueprint and saying: Hey, let's try it boys and girls. But what is the blueprint for that community born from above - born of the Spirit:

- "The believers were of one heart and soul." There were moments in Israel's history where they were united under God's Lordship, but not since Adam looked at Eve BEFORE the fall and said "this at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh," was there a total unity of heart and soul.
- "With great power the Apostles gave their testimony." Remember, it's the same Apostles who kept getting it wrong, who abandoned Jesus, who were terrified. But when they spoke with power born of the Spirit, the people completely trusted their leadership and message, because they knew it was not of human origin.

- "And grace was upon them all." If we wanted to write the next verses of the hymn, *Amazing Grace*, it wouldn't stop at "saving a wretch like me." It would continue on with lines about absolutely everything coming from God and that all I think I have is for those who need it, not for my gratification and security. Probably the vow of obedience that some of our religious communities make comes closest to this.
- "There was not one needy person among them." Most of us work at giving to the needy in some fashion or others. And you know people whose hearts ache at the suffering in the world. In that world, greed operates freely, which is probably why Jesus says "the poor you will always have with you." But in a world which mirrors the vision of heaven, and animated by the Holy Spirit, there is not one needy person among them.

Interpretation

Today, there is a profound hunger. People everywhere are trying to spend more and more time with others who are more and more like them. The result is often a spreading of hatred about those who are not like them. It's a desperate attempt for community at the exact same time that the prevailing philosophy is to have your own truth. My truth. Your truth. No problem. Believe what you want. No one should criticize you for that.

If Jesus was trying to start such a perfect community, one could say he failed miserably. It should have worked. All he did was to heal and lift up and reconcile. But, even though he had the Spirit himself, from his conception, from his baptism, the Spirit had not come on the community. And so there was division, mistrust and hatred of him.

Nicodemus was strongly attracted to Jesus, contrary to the rest of the Pharisees in the Sanhedrin. He knew there was something but he couldn't quite get it, even when Jesus, as he says, talked of earthly things, never mind the things of heaven. Even he wasn't ready for that kind of communal spirit.

Jesus' friends and disciples didn't get it after he died. They didn't say: why don't we start a community based on the principles our Lord taught us, in his memory.

Even after his resurrection, they didn't do that. They were excited. They were thrilled. They praised God for it but, like Nicodemus, they didn't grasp the full meaning of the resurrection and certainly didn't know what to do about it.

Barnabas, a Levitical priest, is given to us as an example of the kind of person who has been transformed. He is what Nicodemus, a Pharisee, could become if he would just look up to the Spirit. Barnabas became "A Son of encouragement." He sold his property and laid it at the Apostles feet, for the building up of the community.

There was a sudden and profound understanding of how everything fit together. Suddenly, all of Israel's history made sense. Suddenly they could see where it had always been heading. Suddenly, Jesus made sense in a way that even those closest to him could never have imagined. HE IS ALIVE. HE IS RISEN. The beautiful and profound piece of the puzzle of God's plan to save all humanity has fallen into place.

Call To Action

The trick is that we can't create this community. We try with the philosophy of accepting everyone's truths. But, instead of those millions of different truths, we have millions of people isolated. We should be able to get along. But hostility and name calling continue to rise. Anxiety and alienation continue to wreak havoc on our young people.

Many people have the right idea. Love one another, be kind, treat people with respect, honour differences rather than ridicule. There is one thing missing. It's belief in God and His animating Spirit. For us who know about the Holy Spirit and have been given the grace of the sacraments it's not hopeless. We have the vision of heaven that came at Pentecost.

Perhaps today we can allow this Spirit to operate in us in two ways. First is to hear the words "Let your Spirit come down on these gifts to make them holy" as if for the first time. Second is to take the risen Christ home with us and pray earnestly for the grace to be of one heart and soul with Christ and with those he came to save.