

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: Acts 2:42-47 (NT page 1094)

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Background to the reading

The background of our reading is in fact the words in the previous paragraph that we did not read.

Peter preached the Gospel of Jesus' redemption, resurrection and ascension after they received God's Holy Spirit. Everyone in Jerusalem wondered what is happening. Then Peter explained about Jesus and His mission to this earth. The people responded in faith and asked what they can do?

38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." ⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

The Jewish historian Josephus estimated that during this time there were about six thousand Pharisees in all Palestine. In comparison to this, three thousand conversions to the new Jesus movement in Jerusalem was no small start!

Most special groups in antiquity ate together (Pharisaic fellowships). Many Greek associations met for communal meals only once a month. This earliest Christian practice of daily meals (later reduced to weekly) is thus noteworthy. Table fellowship or koinoinia denoted intimacy, and discussions or even lectures at meals were common.

The Greek language Luke uses in verses 43-45 is language that Pythagoreans and others used for the ideal, utopian community with the one difference. Luke wanted to emphasize the radical lifestyle they chose just because they received God's Spirit. Unlike the Pythagoreans

and other mystical sects that existed, the early Christians acknowledged that Jesus owned both them and their property. They sold off property to meet needs as they arise and opened their homes as meeting places for fellow Christians. These actions do not reflect a self denying, ascetic ideal, as in some Greek and Jewish sects, but instead the practice of radically valuing people over possessions. Such behavior reportedly continued among Christians well into the second century, and it was long ridiculed by pagans until pagan values finally overwhelmed the church.

The temple in Jerusalem was one of the best public place to gather, and people often congregated there. There were hours of public prayer at the morning and evening offerings.

The language, style and intonation of our text emphasizes the reaction of ordinary people to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of God's Spirit.

Amen

MP 760

When we walk with the Lord

Sermon

What is fellowship?

Is it a sort of grouping of people whereby just certain people are included? Is it a "in your face sort of co-existence" in close proximity with other people.

In South Africa most prison officers had tied housing within the prison grounds. The prison authorities also arranged school buses to take the children to school, maintained and looked after the houses and gardens, provided club houses, sometimes with swimming pools for socialising. On the outside you would think: wow! It sounds like a win, win situation. No mortgage, no maintenance, no responsibilities of child care in the morning, and no garden to attend to.

If you think this is a great option, think again. The hours I spent sorting out disputes among neighbours, and work colleagues. Even the

children were affected which off course resulted in fights on the playgrounds and in the busses on the way to home or to school.

Surely this was a fellowship of some kind? But yes a lot of you will say, the situation was different from that of a Christian fellowship, hence the reason for all the trouble.

Is this really the case? Is the current day church still full of people who live in harmony with one another, who shares everything they have and who eats together with other believers with glad and sincere hearts? Can the current day church say in all honesty that all their members are harmonious?

So what is the difference then between us and the early church?

I think the answer lies in what we understand "fellowship" to be. It is a translation from the Greek word *koinonia* which means "to share in" to have Fellowship with", communion and participation. The word designates a common sharing or participation in something. It describes the fellowship of true believers with their Lord and with one another. In the New Testament it is clear that:

Communion arises out of new birth and is therefore restricted to those who are "in Christ". Their common spiritual paternity makes them one common brotherhood. Thus communion represents the spiritual unity that binds believers to Jesus Christ and to each other. This unity transcends natural bounds, although it does not thereby abolish providential differences between believers .

This communion finds its visible outlet in the mutual sharing of material blessings. In the apostolic community at Pentecost this sharing took the form of a community of goods, although it is not evident that this innovation became a precedent for subsequent times.

In the present life communion of "saints" or believers finds its highest realization in the fellowship with the Triune God. In Christ's sufferings the believer finds a fellowship that is visibly portrayed in the Lord's Supper. This blessed communion reaches its consummation in the eternal fellowship of believers with the Triune God and with one another and this communion constitutes a paramount blessing of the glory of heaven.

So the difference then is the “communion” with Christ or in other words having a relationship with God. Whenever this connection happens, there will be **koinonia** with God and our brothers and sisters in faith.

And whenever we experience this koinonia then we will be able to share easier, gossip less and forgive more. Then our fellowship will become the fellowship God intended for us to have and then other people will also want to join in.

If there is one thing more certain than the fact that “rain” is always wet, then it is that other people are often drawn into the church not by the words of church members but through the working of God’s Holy Spirit enabling church members to connect with their local communities in a real and tangible way.

It is no wonder that the oldest confession of faith, the Apostles creed mentions koinonia or the communion of believers when it confesses@
“I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the **communion** of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.”

May we live this confession in the way we love, embrace, forgive and help all people in our Parish. May we also reach out a loving hand towards our children, wherever they are.

Amen