



Come and See!

April 8, 2018

The Word...

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.

With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus,
and great favor was accorded them all.

There was no needy person among them,
for those who owned property or houses would sell them,
bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles,
and they were distributed to each according to need.

(from Acts 4:32-35)

Pondering the Word...

Can you even imagine something like this happening today? There are places in the world where this occurs out of sheer necessity. There are scattered kibbutzim and communes and religious communities whose members commit to share everything in common, but in suburban America, where I live? We tend to guard our property, possessions, and independence fiercely.

In his encyclical, *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis takes a cue from this Acts story. He suggests we take a hard look at what we consider to be personal property. Society's definition has broadened to include things that rightly belong to all humankind: clean air and water, adequate food supply, and housing.

"Solidarity presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few...The private ownership of goods is justified by the need to protect and increase them, so they can better serve the common good; for this reason, solidarity must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them." (188, 189)

Look around your life. What things do you see as your private property that are in fact common resources for the whole world?

Living the Word...

Time to 'fess up: Do you waste water? I'm sorry to say I do. Some think the next world war will be fought over water. Just because I pay for the water I use doesn't give me license to waste this valuable, rapidly depleting resource. Do we dispose of things in ways that protect our environment? Do we conserve energy? It's easy to shake my head at government waste or corporate greed, but have I looked in the mirror?

History shows humankind may never learn to share things fairly, at least not on a consistent basis. But we know we can and do come together when disaster strikes. What if we were to live with that kind of generosity every day? Spend time this spring seeing what you can do to share what you have, not just as charitable giving, but with a real eye towards changing your mindset and habits. By all means, get the kids involved. It is their world we impact: "*We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors — we borrow it from our children.*"

Personal Reflections and Ideas: _____

Apr 9: *"Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will."* (Ps 40)

When you hear the expression, "God's will," what comes to mind? Unfortunately, too many people use this expression to try to explain the unexplainable when tragedy occurs. Others may envision God as a puppeteer, pulling the strings and dictating what happens in our lives. The noun "will" has a hardness or insistence that can be off-putting. What about thinking of it this way: "Here I am, Lord; I come to do what you want for me and from me." "I come to do 'the plans you have for my welfare, not for woe, to give me a future full of hope.'" (Jer 29:11) "I come to use the bounteous gifts you have given me to show love and compassion for all your creatures." If we believe "all things work together for good," (Rm 8:28) then we have faith that all will be well. Think about saying each morning, "Here I am, Lord, ready to live this day guided by your Spirit."

Apr 10: *"'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."* (Jn 3:7b-15)

Nicodemus doesn't get it. How can one be born again? Jesus explains it's not so important to know how it occurs—it's a mystery, like the source of the wind. The important thing is how the lives of those born of the Spirit are changed. *"Those just now sinful become holy; the thoughtless become serious...the vicious, moral...the prayerless, prayerful; the rebellious and obstinate, meek, and mild, and gentle. When we see such changes, we ought no more to doubt that they are produced by some mighty agent than when we see the trees moved or feel the cooling effects of a summer's breeze..."* (Albert Barnes, adapted) Have you been born from above? How has the wonderful, mysterious breath of the Spirit changed your life?

Apr 11: *"God did not send his Son to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him."* (Jn 3: 16-21)

If you are burdened with guilt or shame, remember this passage. Even if the world condemns you, God does not, and offers you peace and salvation. Don't give up hope. Turn to Jesus.

Apr 12: *"Taste and see how good the LORD is"* (Ps 34)

What do Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the evangelist John have in common? All three are instructed by God to "eat" the scrolls upon which God's word is written. (Jer 15:15; Ez 2: 8-3:3, and Rev 10:9-11). A metaphor perhaps for a visceral experience of taking into one's being the richness, and yes, at times, the bitterness of God's word. Listen with your whole self to the Word of God. Pay attention to what "tastes" sweet to you and what leaves a sour taste—these are both good avenues to prayer.

Apr 13: *"For if this endeavor or this activity is of human origin, it will destroy itself. But if it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy them; you may even find yourselves fighting against God."* (Acts 5:34-42)

Wise words from the Pharisee Gamaliel. Advice the Church should consider now. The Spirit of Vatican II is reemerging under Francis' leadership. As Albert Nolan, OP, writes in *Jesus Before Christianity*, "our search...is primarily a search for *orthopraxis* (true practice) rather than *orthodoxy* (true doctrine)." God is always making things new—will those longing for pre-Vatican II orthodoxy find themselves fighting against God?

Apr 14: *As the number of disciples continued to grow, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.* (Acts 6:1-7)

On Sunday, we read how "the community of believers was of one heart and mind," and that all possessions were shared based on need. We see today how, as the community grew quickly, things got a bit difficult! Old habits and biases rose to the surface. Those in charge of the distribution of food might have shown partiality to the Hebrew widows over the Gentiles. It's not hard to see how quickly divisions, schisms, and wars happen! Sometimes, we get so busy doing good—I'm sure the disciples saw their role of distributing food to be a good and holy one—we fail to step back to see if we are still being true to the real mission. Or we forget that the role of minister (which, if we are truly Christians, we all play in one form or another) is in fact the role of servant. Make a point to take time each day—perhaps around noontime—to do a quick check-in: "Am I ministering and living 'the Way'—the way Christ intends me to live?"