

Lesson-7

CHURCH: THE COMMUNITY OF PEOPLE WHO SHARE



One day Jesus went up a mountain, on the shore of the sea of Tiberius, and sat down with his disciples. And a multitude come up to him. He felt compassion for them. He taught them and healed the sick among them. When it was evening the disciples asked Jesus to send the people away, so that they could go to the villages and buy food for themselves. But Jesus told them : **“They need not go away: you give them something to eat.”** They told him, **“we have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.”** Jesus told them to make the people sit in rows. Thus Jesus took the loaves and fish and blessed them and gave them to his disciples to be served among the people. All the people ate and were satisfied and they gathered twelve baskets full of fragments that were left over. (Jn. 6:1-13, Mt. 14:13-21).

Sharing in Jesus' Life and Teaching

Jesus came for those who suffer hunger and thirst, those who are afflicted by various diseases and those who are overburdened by their sins. He gave himself totally for them. He gave them his flesh and blood and his entire life. The disciples of Jesus should be marked by this quality of sharing.



John, the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus told the people that those who had two coats should share with those who had none and do the same with food. (Lk. 3:11). The message of sharing shows clearly in Jesus' teaching. He asked his disciples to give freely what they had received as gifts. To the one who would take away your coat, give your cloak as well. While giving alms, the left hand should not know what the right hand is doing. (Mt. 10:8; 5:40-42; 6:3-4). The same message of sharing is brought home in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus multiplied bread in order to share it with those who were hungry. The Church, called to follow the example and teaching of Jesus, is bound to be a sharing community.



The Example of the Early Church

The early Church lived in its fullness the compassion of Jesus and His readiness to share. We read in the Acts of the Apostles, the community of believers was of one heart and one soul. Nobody claimed anything as his own. Everything was held in common and there was no one in want among them. For, they sold everything they had and brought the proceeds and laid it at the feet of the apostles and distribution was made according to each one's need



(Acts 4:32-36). We read in the Acts, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). As they continued to grow in their generosity and good will to share, there was no one who suffered poverty or want among them.

The Teaching of the Early Church

We should grow in our generosity and readiness to share with others in imitation of Jesus who though he was rich, became poor for our sake. St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians teaches us on alms giving and charity (Phil. 4:15-18). God loves those who give cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:7). Alms giving is an acceptable sacrifice to God. Apostle James tells us that we should show our faith in action by helping those who are in need. “If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill”, and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? so faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (James 2:15-17). The disciples urged the early Christian community to share with others through their teachings and examples with a generous heart.

The breaking of the bread in the early Church was an occasion of sharing with the poor. St. Paul scolded the Church in Corinth for neglecting the poor during the 'agape' at the Lord's supper. Paul wanted to collect money to help the poor Church in Judea. “On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn, so that collections need not be taken when I come” (1 Cor. 16:2).

The Hope of Resurrection as the Motive Force for Sharing

It was the hope of resurrection that motivated the early Christians to share what they had, with the needy ones. Another motive force that prompted them to share was the teaching of Jesus about the final Judgment at the end of time and how he would address the just and say that when they did it to the least of his brethren, they did it to him. Those who put all their trust in material things can never share. Only those who put their trust in God and believe in resurrection and eternal life can share what they have with others. The awareness that everything in the world is perishable and nothing material can be carried away when one dies, prompts people to share what they have with others. They are urged to engage themselves in charitable deeds and

sharing of material resources so that they may reap its fruit in eternal life.

The Eucharistic Sacrifice and Sharing

The Eucharistic sacrifice, which is at the very centre of Christian life, urges and enables us to share. **The bread that we break and the cup that we share at the Eucharistic table is a strong invitation and call to the worshipping community, to share what they have with the poor while living out their Christian lives.** As believers, who participate in the Eucharistic sacrifice, we should be prepared to share with others all that we have. We really become witnesses of sharing when we give our knowledge, our time, our wealth and our health for the well being of others, especially the poor, the sick, the aged and the abandoned.

A Sharing Church

Sharing is the fundamental nature of the Church which is the body of Christ. When one member of the body suffers pain, it affects the entire body and steps will be taken to relieve that pain. In the same way, in the body of Christ, the Church, we should engage ourselves in charitable deeds to relieve the sufferings of others.

The majority of the world population who are poor, find their hope in the Charity and sharing of the Church. The institutions managed by the Catholic Church use their resources for the common good and not for the individual benefit of those who run these institutions. We can see this spirit reflected in the educational institutions, hospitals, orphanages, counseling centers, hospitals for the mentally retarded, boys' homes, homes for the aged, centers for the care of cancer patients and aids patients and rehabilitation centers for those who are released from prisons.



The Church is proud of Fr. Damien who lived and died for lepers, St. Vincent de Paul who dedicated his total life for the care of the poor and the abandoned, and Mother Teresa who became a model of Charity and love for the entire world. The Church should be always at the beck and call of the poor, the abandoned and the persecuted. The members of the Church should actively participate in works of charity and become witnesses of a sharing Church in the world.

**Word of God
to Read and
Meditate**

Acts 4:32-5:11

Word of God to Remember

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me (Mt. 25:40).

Let us Pray

Jesus who gave yourself totally for us in an act of sharing help us to share with others all the gifts you have given us.

My Resolution

I shall use my time and energy to help my fellow-students.

To Think with the Church

Similarly, the Church encompasses with her love all those who are afflicted by human misery and she recognizes in those who are poor and who suffer, the image of her poor and suffering founder. She does all in her power to relieve their need and in them she strives to serve Christ. (Vat. II, The Church, No. 8)

To Know the Mother Church

Mar Thomma Christians used to observe faithfully fasting, abstinence and almsgiving. They observed abstinence on all Wednesdays and Fridays of the year. Besides, they observed abstinence for 25 days in preparation for Christmas, that is during the advent season, and 50 days, during the season of great lent. Over and above they observed a three day's abstinence known as '**Moongnu Nompu**', an eight days' abstinence known as '**Ettu Nompu**' and a fifteen days abstinence known as '**Pathinanchu Nompu**'. On days of abstinence they ate only vegetarian food. The days of fasting and abstinence were days of special prayers and almsgiving.

Questions

1. Christian sharing is rooted in the life and teachings of Jesus. Explain.
2. What was the life-style of the early Church?
3. What are the teachings of the early Church on sharing?
4. It is the hope of resurrection that urges one to share: illustrate.
5. Sharing is the fundamental nature of the Church. Explain.