

They Devoted Themselves

WHAT WE FOUND

- Four things, and they are precise: the apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of the bread, and the prayers. Not the teaching of whoever led you to Christ. Not a coffee hour. Not prayer in general, but the appointed prayers at customary hours.
- "The breaking of the bread" is the early Christian expression the Church reads Eucharistically, used at the end of the Emmaus road and at the Sunday gathering in Acts 20. The Catechism cites this verse when it names the Eucharist.
- The sharing of possessions was real and costly, and it was voluntary. Acts 5:4 settles that. The Church holds both the universal destination of goods and the legitimacy of private property, and puts the binding claim sharply: not to let the poor share in our goods is to steal from them.
- They met in two places, daily. The temple and their homes. Not one instead of the other.
- The Lord added to their number. He works through the apostles' preaching and the community's life, and he is the one who adds.
- The favor with all the people did not last. Within a few chapters there is fear, and then persecution.
- Nehemiah 8 shows an anticipatory shape centuries earlier: the word read and explained, festive eating, portions sent to anyone for whom nothing was prepared, and great rejoicing.
- The destination of your friendship is not you. If someone says yes and there is nowhere to put them, the work is only half done.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Justin Martyr describes a Sunday, around the year 155

Writing to a pagan emperor to explain what Christians actually do, St. Justin Martyr describes the Sunday assembly: everyone in the towns and the countryside gathers in one place; the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read for as long as time allows; the one presiding gives a talk urging imitation of these good things; all stand and pray; bread and wine and water are brought; the president offers prayers and thanksgiving; the people give their assent by saying Amen; the gifts are distributed, and deacons carry them to those who are absent. Then those who are prosperous give what they wish, and the collection is used for orphans, widows, the sick, prisoners, and strangers.

Read that list against Acts 2:42, and then against last Sunday. The same essential elements are still visibly present roughly a century after St. Luke wrote. Do not claim they appear in Acts 2:42's order; Justin's sequence runs readings and exhortation, prayers, Eucharist, then the collection.

St. Justin Martyr, First Apology, chapters 65 to 67 (c. AD 155).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope Benedict XVI on three things that cannot be separated

Pope Benedict XVI wrote that the Church's deepest nature is expressed in a threefold responsibility: proclaiming the word of God, celebrating the sacraments, and exercising the ministry of charity. These duties presuppose each other, he said, and cannot be separated from one another.

That is Acts 2:42 to 45 stated as a principle. A community that preaches and does not serve, or serves and does not worship, has not chosen a specialty. It has lost something.

Pope Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est 25 (2005).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. John Chrysostom on whose goods they are

Not to enable the poor to share in our goods, St. John Chrysostom said, is to steal from them and to deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs.

The Catechism quotes him in exactly those words. Keep it in view before anyone gets comfortable calling verses 44 and 45 a first-century experiment that does not apply.

St. John Chrysostom, quoted at CCC 2446.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

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Rung 10 of the ladder. From conversation to a room. This week you bring somebody somewhere.

- Keep praying for the three by name, daily.
- Invite one of them into something with other believers in it. A meal at your house with Catholic friends, a parish event, a service project, a Sunday Mass you go to together. A room, not a conversation.
- Go with them. Do not send them, do not meet them there, and do not leave them standing alone at any point.
- Do not apologise for being Catholic or for bringing them. Notice how strong the urge is.
- Afterward, write down who spoke to them that was not you. Bring the number back next week, whatever it is.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

Acts 2:42

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read Galatians 4:19, 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12, 2 Timothy 2:2, and Acts 18:24-28 before we meet. All four are short. Read the Acts passage last, and read it twice.

CATECHISM REFERENCES

- **CCC 949.** The Catechism opens its subsection on communion in spiritual goods by quoting Acts 2:42.
- **CCC 953.** Communion in charity: nothing any of us does is done in isolation.
- **CCC 1329.** "The breaking of bread" among the names of the Eucharist.
- **CCC 2178.** The Sunday assembly of the faithful, traced to the earliest Christians.
- **CCC 2446.** Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them.
- **CCC 2402-2406.** The universal destination of goods together with the legitimacy of private property.