

Biblical Reflections and Prayers for the 'Eight Days'

5 June – 12 June 2011

Day 4 – Wednesday 8 June

SHARING, AN EXPRESSION OF OUR UNITY

Reading

Isaiah 58:6-10

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry

Psalms 37:1-11

Trust in the Lord and do good

Acts 4:32-37

Everything they owned was held in common

Matthew 6:25-34

Strive first for the kingdom of God



Commentary

The sign of continuity with the apostolic Church of Jerusalem is “devotion to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers.” The Church in Jerusalem, having received the gift of the Holy Spirit, was led beyond the former distinction between what was ‘holy / sacred’ and ‘profane / unclean’. To be in fellowship (*koinonia*) means that all barriers are now down – because the Spirit has come, everything is now ‘open’ (*koinos* – cf Peter’s dream in Acts 10:9-16). And this *koinonia* had practical consequences – sharing, being open to one another. Acts states that ‘All who believed were together and had all things *koinos*; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute to all, as any had need’ (Acts 2:44-45). Today’s reading from the Book of Acts links such radical sharing with the powerful apostolic “testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.”

Such a sharing of resources characterizes the life of Christian people in Jerusalem today. It is a sign of their continuity with the first Christians; it is a sign and a challenge to all the churches. It links proclamation of the Gospel, the celebration of the Eucharist and the fellowship (or communion) of the Christian community with radical equality and justice for all. In so far as such sharing is a testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and a sign of continuity with the apostolic Church of Jerusalem, it is equally a sign of our unity with one another.

There are many ways of sharing. There is the radical sharing of the apostolic church where nobody was left in need. There is the sharing of one another’s burdens, struggles, pain and suffering. There is the sharing in one another’s joys and achievements, blessings and healing. There is also the sharing of gifts and insights from one church tradition to another even in our separation from another, an “ecumenical exchange of gifts.” Such generous sharing is a practical consequence of our devotion to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship; it is a consequence of our prayer for Christian unity.

For Reflection/Discussion

- Try to think objectively and honestly – without being too lenient or too tough on yourself – about how open and accepting your congregation is of newcomers and ‘outsiders’. How could your church become a more welcoming place, and your services be more accessible?
- In many churches the shared use of property is a point of tension. Why is this so? What can be done to relieve the tension?
- How in your local congregation do you share burdens, joys and sorrows?
- What gifts have you received from other traditions in the church? What gifts does your tradition have to share with others?

Prayer

God of justice, your giving of the Spirit broke the bounds of what is holy. We thank you that you have given what we need, so that all may be fed, clothed and housed. Guard us from the sin of hoarding, and inspire us to be instruments of love, sharing all that you give us, as a witness to your generosity and justice. As followers of Christ, lead us to act together in places of want: where families are driven from their homes, where the vulnerable suffer at the hands of the powerful, where poverty and unemployment destroy lives. We pray in the name of Jesus, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



National Council of
Churches in Australia
Faith and Unity Commission