

6. May 2025

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

“Community of goods of the early Church”

Acts 4:32-37

The company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need. Thus Joseph who was surnamed by the apostles Barnabas (which means, Son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field which belonged to him, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

In the first Christian community, what some people dream of, but rarely achieve, became a reality. A community united in spirit, in which goods were distributed according to the needs of each one. All this took place under the influence of the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, and it was a voluntary detachment. In this way no one was in need.

In a perversion of this God-inspired community of goods, some have looked at communism as if it were a similar path.

But they were deceived, because in that system the distribution of goods was not prompted by the Holy Spirit; that is, it was not the fruit of love. At best, it can be assumed that some idealists believed that they could practise justice more effectively in this way.

This deception even infiltrated the Church. Particularly in Latin America, so-called 'liberation theology' began to develop under the influence of clerics and religious who believed that it was appropriate to join forces with political liberation movements. The consequences were predictable: faith became more and more political and less and less transcendent. Thus, the very thing that had characterised the early Christian

community, which had responded to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and not to a political agenda, was lost. In the history of the Church, this community of goods, also inspired by the Spirit and linked to the vow of poverty, would later be put into practice in the religious orders.

Communism, on the other hand, as a political system, proved to be hostile to God and often cruelly oppressed people and deprived them of their freedom.

The community of goods in the early Church was voluntary, but it tolerated no deception, for it was a work of God. The following passage from the Acts of the Apostles, which we will hear next, makes this clear:

Acts 5:1-11

A man named Ananias with his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Hark, the feet of those that have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." Immediately she fell down at his feet and died. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things.

The decisive reason why God put Ananias and Sapphira to death in the sight of all was the deception they had tried to commit. Peter makes it clear: they were under no obligation to give all their possessions to the Church. But apparently they wanted to appear as generous as the other Christians who, moved by the Holy Spirit, had placed all their possessions at the disposal of the Church. But the Holy Spirit is not deceived!

Their lie came to light. No doubt this also served as a warning to the whole Christian community, for if such a deception had gone unnoticed in the early Church, the doors would have been opened to the spirits of evil.

When a person begins to act against the Holy Spirit and deceive, he will continue to do so and may even get worse unless he repents and recognises his fault. Just think of the example of Judas Iscariot, who, according to the Gospel, was in charge of the purse and "used to take what was put into it" (Jn 12:6), and who later became the betrayer of the Lord.

Given the importance of the nascent Church, it is understandable that the Lord took such a drastic step, which caused great fear. It was to serve as a clear warning for all time that we should walk in sincerity and openness with God, for He cannot be deceived.

Meditation on the day's reading: <https://en.elijamission.net/everything-must-serve-the-kingdom-of-god/>

Meditation on the day's Gospel: <https://en.elijamission.net/god-is-waiting-for-us-2/>