Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

April 17, 2023
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint



“The community of believers was of one heart and mind” (Acts 4:32).

Acts 4:32-37; Jn 3:7b-15

Today’s image of the Christian community in Acts brings to mind a wonderful story shared by one of NCR’s more illustrious reporters, Gary MacEoin. He was born in Ireland, and his long life nearly spanned the entire 20th century. Having witnessed

so much, he had stories about everything. One of them described an Irish socialist candidate holding forth to a crowd of farmers about the blessings of sharing all our earthly goods, touted by principles of socialism.

The candidate asked them: “Now, if you had two cars, wouldn’t you be glad to share one?” No one owned even one car, so it made perfect sense to share the extra if they had two. “And, Seamus,” he said, pointing to a poor neighbor, “if you owned two houses, surely you’d share one of them?” Two houses! Who could imagine it? Of course, everyone would share one if they had two houses.

Then a man in the crowd asked him, “Tom, if you had two pigs, would you gladly share one of them?” The candidate scowled and said to the man, “Ain’t fair, Doherty! You know full well I’ve actually got two pigs!”

Today’s reading from Acts gives us a glimpse, idealistic to be sure, of the early Christian community in which all property was shared communally. Those with houses and property sold them and brought the proceeds to the Apostles, who distributed them to each according to their needs. We know that the practice of voluntary poverty survived mostly in religious communities, though some Christian communes have also flourished like this. But private property became the standard for most societies. Any system to redistribute wealth has always been debated. It is practiced imperfectly through progressive taxation to maintain the public good.

What is noteworthy in the Acts account is that life was defined by belief in the Resurrection. Life here and now was judged in the light of the life to come. Christ’s self-emptying love led to abundant life, and his followers witnessed God’s gift of eternal life by living generously and sharing their lives in the short time allotted to us in this world. What does it profit us to be selfish to the point of gaining the whole material world if it cost us eternity with God?

This is a work in progress, but the Christian rule remains: From each according to his or her means, and to each according to his or her needs. This produces a community in which everyone can flourish in love. It is up to us to apply this challenge to our everyday lives.