



Ask, Father James

The first three hundred years of Christianity were years of persecution by the succession of Roman Emperors - from Nero to Diocletian - that drove it underground. Church history identified "ten emperor persecutions" that the early church endured before its eventual triumph. These emperors issued state edicts that prohibited Christians from either assembling together or attending burial in cemeteries. Instead, Christians and their bodies were fed to lions for sport. However, despite all these the church and those early Christians survived were growing in their togetherness through human feelings, initiatives and mutual sympathy in their trust in the grace of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ.

That spirit which they exhibited was called *Koinōnia*. It has four main characteristics; fidelity to doctrine (apostles creed or *didache*), fellowship (*koinonia*), breaking of bread (Eucharist) and prayer (Acts 2:42). The first Christians saw themselves as brothers and sisters and encouraged one another in the face of trials as they dealt with the tensions and at the same time holding on to the faith. *Koinonia*, is a Greek term found in the New Testament. This term was not used by Jesus nor does it have a precise Old Testament parallel. It was Paul who first made allusions to *koinonia*, using it to describe how the early Christians lived the Eucharist as a church. He wanted to emphasize that at the Last Supper, Jesus intended *koinonia*. Paul wrote; "the Lord Jesus, on the night of his arrest, took bread... and broke it... and said; "This is my body, which is broken for you..." (1 Cor. 11:23-25). Thus, "When we bless the cup of blessing, is it not a means of sharing [*koinonia*] in the blood of Christ? When we break the bread, is it not a means of sharing [*koinonia*] in the body of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Today, we have all been impacted in various ways by covid-19, including the cancellation of the worship services gatherings and observances of feasts and religious festivals, especially Easter, Church's most important festival and our Sunday gatherings. Millions of Catholics have been unable to physically take part in the celebration of the Mass for weeks, and may not be able to again for more weeks to come. While some are gratefully enjoying the live stream opportunity of the forced virtualization of the Mass during this pandemic some Catholics runs the risk of simply not returning when all this is over. Simply put, the coronavirus pandemic is fundamentally changing how we do and be church.

The early Christians through *koinonia* not only share the gospel with each other but also shared their goods and they even sold their possessions to hand the earned money out to those who needed it through the church (Acts 2,45). In the face of Covid-19, we need more *koinonia*. I mean, we need to develop spiritual relationship, first with each other, with the parish church and, equally, sharing worldly goods. Pope Francis through his *Urbi et Orbi* blessing of March 27, 2020 offered encouraging words asking us to check in on friends and family by phone or internet, or to deliver groceries to those in need. As parish, we are doing the same. We are phoning to check on our people and sending emails and bulletins to all parishioners and streaming Masses to them at home. We are also being mindful of the poor amongst us (this is what we might call "material" *koinonia*). As our church offerings rolls in we try to pay our church bills and meet up also with a wide range of community, communion, sharing, fellowship, participation, partnership, and solidarity obligations. This too shall pass away and we shall survive to carry on doing what Christ commanded us to do in his memory...

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