



This week's first reading at Mass gives us a snapshot of the first Christians' life together. It reads like some fairytale, missing only "and they lived happily ever after." It sounds like the beginnings of a utopian society. In reality this experiment didn't last long. As with all utopian attempts, human nature got in the way. We slithered into the US community-

We can find a vestige of this once-upon-a-time venture in today's monasteries and some religious communities. Within a monastery, the individual monk owns nothing while the community owns everything. Monks don't get pay checks or allowances. If they need anything, the community provides it. If Bro. Choleric needs a suit, he would approach the prior (the monk in charge of day-to-day life) for permission to get a suit and would be sent the Cellarer whose job it was to provide for the physical needs of the community. That brother would send Bro. Choleric to a particular store where he would get a suit and charge it to the monastery. This Cellarer would have on hand tooth paste, soap, towels, shaving cream and razors, etc., etc. Monks would simply ask for what they needed and it would be supplied. In some monasteries each year the individual monk had to itemize all he had in his cell, turning that list in to the Abbot.

Of course, to be able to provide for a community of monks, which included buildings to pray, work and live within, the community had to raise money. Each monastery has some specific work that brings in the money needed for the community to survive. This includes sending the priests out on weekends to help local parishes or to give retreats. Upon their return to the monastery, they would hand over the money they earned. Monasteries often have a guest house which generated income. Monks were not paid for any retreats given in the guest house: the cost for the stay at the guest house went directly into the common pot.

The Abbot of the monastery had the job of finding donors who to contribute to the support of the monastery. These donors were mostly from the higher side of the economic ladder or folks living near the monastery.

Our parish can learn a great deal from the economics of this way of life. Holy Guardian Angels is a *community*. And our community has needs just like a monastic community: safe and sound buildings (2 churches, 2 rectories, parish center, parking lots); heating and air-conditioning; salaries for employees to take care of the buildings and grounds as well as answer the phone, file baptism and wedding documents, answer questions from parishioners, arrange for funerals, administer religious education programs and sacramental preparations, etc. Unlike monasteries, the members of our *community* do not take vows to live religious life, but we do have Baptismal vows and the teaching of the Lord binding ourselves to common worship and caring for one another, which is the point of the story in Acts.

All the members of our community are responsible for Building up and maintaining our community. Like the monks who earned money by taking jobs of various sorts for the support of the community, we, too, who work for a salary, have a responsibility to financially support our community. This is not a free will offering as much as it is thanksgiving for all God has given to us. By God's gift we are alive and have the opportunity and the ability to hold a job. For these gifts we owe God. Just look around at how many people don't have those blessings.

While some have the finances to contribute; some may not. St. Paul said on one of his letters that God does not expect anyone to become destitute by giving their money away. If we don't have the money to give, there are ways to contribute to our community life other than money. People can volunteer their time in various different areas: money counters for the weekly collections; helping to decorate the church for different seasons; beautifying the grounds; serving at the liturgies (altar serving is not just for kids anymore); visiting the sick and home bound; greeters at the doors for weekend Masses; helping the Parish Council prepare celebrations for when we finally get to open up completely and much more.

Like many parents who remind their kids, "I don't have a money tree in the back yard," we don't either. All of us need to take responsibility for our community by contributing whatever we can to make our community a solvent and vibrant place, a community people *want* to be part of.

Soon the Corona virus will be under control allowing all of us to come together again. As we do, we need to thank God for getting us through this awful time. We should not let this opportunity go by without thinking about what we've experienced and learned...we *need* each other; we *need* to be together in our parish community.

I give thanks for all the good people who continued to support our community during this pandemic time. Because of you, our parish is still here and looking toward the future. The question is: How can we contribute to make this good community better? We all have something to contribute. Be generous in giving to God as God has been generous to you.

*Fr. Denis*