



"And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2: 42). The Bible text for today's devotional takes us back to the time of the first Christian congregations. The Apostles had been commissioned by Jesus Christ and had received the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1: 8). After Pentecost they began to teach and to baptise. They proclaimed the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and its meaning for salvation.

Their appearance in the power of the Holy Spirit had a pronounced effect, their words "cut to the heart" (Acts 2: 37). This is how the first congregation was established. The gifts of the Holy Spirit developed within it and the members nurtured a close fellowship, which was characterised by a special bond between them, the focus on the gospel, the celebration of Holy Communion, and prayer.

#### **Four characteristics of the Christian congregation**

A Christian congregation is made up of those who are baptised and who practise their faith in fellowship with other baptised souls rather than live independently of one another. That was the case for the congregation in Jerusalem and is also the case today.

Christian faith is always focused on fellowship, whose distinguishing feature is the love for God and one's neighbour (John 13: 35). Within the Christian congregation there should be support for each other each in faith, as well as in the concerns of daily life. The unity of the church is made possible by having faith in Jesus Christ, His salvation-bringing death, His resurrection, and return.

The doctrine of the Apostles, which is spoken of in our Bible passage, is nothing other than the gospel. The Apostles testified that Jesus is the Christ and that it is only in Him that perfect salvation can be attained. This doctrine of the Apostles is recorded in the Holy Scriptures. The present-day proclamation of the Apostles and ministers serves to make the gospel understandable for the people of today and to call them to have faith in Christ.

The breaking of bread means Holy Communion, in which Christians of all ages can experience the presence of Jesus Christ. The congregation is united with Jesus Christ and with each other in the Lord's Supper. The partaking of the body and blood of Jesus is the high point of the divine service and is celebrated until such time as the Lord comes again.

Prayer is conversation with God and enables a close connection with Him. His greatness can become more evident to us when we worship Him; we are able to experience the richness of His gifts when we come to Him in thankfulness; our trust in His support can increase when we bring our petitions to Him; and the love for our

neighbour can grow through our intercessions. A congregation which prays together grows in fellowship and understanding of one another.

Jesus Christ sent Apostles both then and today. Among other things, they have the task of strengthening the congregations, proclaiming the gospel in the right way, and calling people to be repentant. Our Bible passage invites us to reflect on whether our congregation really does stand for the same traditions as the early Christian congregation in Jerusalem did!

15 July 2020