

May 28, 2017 The Upper Room Homily: Brothers and sisters, as a long-time reader of mystery novels, I am able to make at least one key observation about the standard formula used by many of the renowned authors of the literary genre, in particular the British writer Agatha Christie. As a story draws to a dramatic close, the fictional detective, say Hercule Poirot or Miss Marple, requests that all the suspects in the case (usually a murder case) gather together in a rather spacious and elegant room, one familiar to them all. Once the detective has them in place, he then unmasks the villain, exposing him or her publicly.

After the ascension the disciples, having received instructions from Jesus (Acts 1:12), return to Jerusalem. The first disciples remained together in the "upper room" (Acts 1:13), gathered around the mother Of Jesus. It is surely worth noting that, according to some scholars, it is the very place where Jesus gathered with the twelve apostles for a farewell meal and in which he "unmasked" the villain, Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. In today's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the Evangelist St. Luke offers his readers a fascinating glimpse of the life of the first believers. The community, so we are told, spends time in prayer while awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will invest them with power to witness to the risen Christ. Conspicuously absent is their master, Jesus Christ and the disgraced Judas who, at one time, enjoyed a special friendship with Jesus as a member of his inner circle. Neither one is mentioned in Luke's chronicle of the event. Nevertheless, the room is haunted with memories of the two principal figures.

What possible lessons may we derive from today's reading from Acts? First, Christians are members of a praying community. In our culture of exaggerated individualism and "private, go-it-alone" religion, it is good to be reminded that Christianity is a communal religion: Second, prayer united the early Christians. Luke writes, "They devoted themselves with one accord to prayer." (Acts 1:14) One is reminded of the 33rd psalm of the Old Testament, "Look how good and pleasing is the dwelling of brothers together."

In 1863, the then President, Abraham Lincoln, issued a proclamation, calling upon all Americans to observe a national day of prayer, fasting and humiliation. At the time of its issuance, the American civil war was raging and many lives were lost on the fields of battle. Lincoln recognized that the United States was "a house divided". A thoughtful man, he believed in the power of prayer as a necessary first step in restoring unity. A house divided cannot stand. Lincoln wanted America to be "one nation under God", and he voiced his desire that North and South be reconciled and healed after two years of bloodshed.

In conclusion, Luke reminds us that the Church from its inception is apostolic. Please note the names of the eleven apostles chosen by Our Lord in this brief reading. Today we gather as a family, a praying community. In doing so, we imitate the Christians of the early church who gathered around the Blessed Mother and received the manifold gifts of the Spirit. We are truly blessed!

Amen!