

**Rev. Kevin V. Madigan**  
**Church of Our Lady of Good Counsel-St. Thomas More April 19, 2020**  
**Easter 2nd Sunday 2020 Acts 2:42-47**

"No man is an island." Yes, we are all familiar with the words of the poet, John Donne, but for these past several weeks, we have come to live them more intently. Although we may be isolating ourselves physically by "sheltering in place" or "social distancing," we have become much more mindful of our interconnectedness, and how our actions—for better or worse—affect others. "We are all in this together" has become a sort of mantra to remind us of the Biblical axiom, that "we are indeed our brother's keeper." (Genesis 4:9) The hyper individualism that has so often characterized our society has tended to put the emphasis on our rights, but lately we have become more aware of our responsibilities.

Today's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles recalls the spirit that characterized the early Christian community. "They held all things in common...they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need." (2:44) It is unlikely that we are going to begin replicating that behavior, but we can appreciate and embody the aspect of solidarity that animated their behavior. Those first followers of Jesus were transformed by their encounter with the risen Christ. These weeks of quarantine can give us the opportunity to reflect on, to pray over how we can be different after we emerge from our forced isolation, how we can more deliberately make our own contribution to the common good, rather than focusing exclusively just on what's good for me and mine.

An over emphasis on the individual and one's personal rights contributes to what Pope Francis calls a "throwaway culture," where everything is judged by its immediate utility. Human beings are treated as objects to be discarded when they are no longer of use to those pursuing their own naked self-interest. Autonomy and choice trump dignity and social justice. Although this attitude may lead to a greater enjoyment of material things, it has not lead to greater happiness. Quite the opposite. While this "me-centered" attitude has generated the allure of freedom, it has instead delivered misery for countless of our fellow-citizens. There is an epidemic of loneliness in the land, with growing numbers of people lacking meaningful connections and having fewer intimate friendships. We have witnessed a dramatic rise in what we might call "deaths of despair—from suicide to drug and alcohol poisoning and abuse. The "American dream" has become a nightmare for too many.

The threat of the coronavirus has opened our eyes to the fragility of life and the vulnerability of human existence. Our illusions of control and absolute autonomy are

being shattered. We may indeed be proud of our accomplishments and successes, but our individual flourishing depends on the contributions of others, and to these we bear a responsibility. In recent weeks we have become more aware of the risks taken by the minimum-wage workers in our hospitals and grocery stores. We have seen the effects of the disparity of income and a lack of access to decent health care. For those who have lost their jobs, the safety net is barely adequate. Now is the time to foster a sense of community, of solidarity, instead of grasping for comfort in an imagined invincibility.

Let us heed the words of Pope Francis "The tragedy we are experiencing summons us to take seriously the things that are serious, and not to be caught up in those that matter less; to rediscover that life is of no use if not used to serve others. For life is measured by love."