

In my bedroom I hang a collage of photographs. They show members of my family and friends. The pictures remind me of happy days--a time when life was simple, friends were plentiful, family members smiled, and what little we had was enough because we had each other. You probably have photos or a scrapbook that does the same.

Today's first reading, from Acts of the Apostles, is like one of those photos. In a few verses, Luke portrays a community that did everything together: they ate, they prayed, they learned together. They shared what they owned, so if any were needy, others cared for them. The apostles were on honeymoon. They worked miraculous cures. Everybody got along, more people joined every day, and those who didn't kept peace. They lived in perfection: Camelot, Oz, Utopia, and Raytown. It didn't last, but while it did Luke photographed it for our scrapbook, to remind us of happy days.

Now, as with every photograph we own, you could ask, "Were they really that happy, or do you just remember it that way?" Chances are if you look long enough at any happy photo, you'll remember some pain as well. There's a lot we forget. ^{it's long over} Sometimes we so romanticize a photo of the past, that we criticize the life of the present. So we think kids are rotten, government is corrupt, and the church is going to hell because we've left perfection behind. ^{But} sometimes the photo inspires us. We see once we lived in peace, so we strive toward it again. ^{with new dedication}

We hear this passage on the Sunday after Easter because it paints a perfect picture of the church, just as Easter paints the perfect picture of Jesus. Looking at the picture may bring sadness: Since it was taken, martyrs lost their lives; our unity has been splintered into many denominations; our credibility is hurt by leaders who misbehaved. Either this picture makes us despair--for it can never be the same again, or it makes us hope--for we have the Holy Spirit to guide us.

Simple pleasures may seduce us to think that their happiness is the most sublime, but memories which include pain can bring the most hope. Memories of pain, sorrow, and death, widen our vision beyond simple memories of smiles, and give us better hope. They root our hope in what conquers sorrow: the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If the memory of what used to be ever makes us yearn for what we've lost, then the news of Easter hasn't really sunk in, for nothing is lost to the power of Christ.