

## **Community (*Koinonia*) is Salvation**

Acts 4:32-25; I John 5:1-6; John 20:19-31

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Three migrant children were crossing the border through the desert while their parents were already waiting for them sleeplessly in a small US town on the other side. When migration officials came across the group, their coyote abandoned them to their fate. But then one of the other people embarking on that same desert venture succeeded in hiding the children with him, undoubtedly because he sensed what their parents were feeling. He took care of the children and helped them arrive at their destination.

The reunion of that small family community, after days and hours of hopelessness and uncertainty, was an encounter of communion and life. When there are at least the traces of community...and the individual embraces others, then not all is lost.

Likewise the Christian project can only be lived as a communal venture. The entire Christian experience flourished thanks to a life-in-common or *koinonia* (from the Greek word “koinos,” meaning “in common,” “shared”) that became the lifestyle of the early Christians. The Acts of the Apostles testifies to the importance of *koinonia*, or community-communion. And even more than that: The resurrection experience itself took form as multiple small actions were interwoven into communal networks.

Of course, times have changed. Modern subjectivity has taught us that no one can escape the distinctly personal rhythms and life-paths of our era without losing direction. Yet the spirit of the group contributes a specific and determining character to the person even under these modern conditions.

Whoever makes it all the way “north” for the first time does so by depending heavily on friends and family connections. By contrast, North Americans value their personal independence so highly that at times they seem to become mere individualists. They are astonished when they see migrant workers living together peaceably even in substandard encampments. They do not realize that the migrants survive such conditions by drawing strength from the communal values of solidarity and spontaneous *koinonia*.

I myself have witnessed these values at work among migrant workers. And it seems to me that these same values jump out at us in the story the Gospel tells about Doubting Thomas...about a personal search, a series of uneasinesses and questions, all wrapped up in sincere yearning to possess clear signs upon which to anchor belief. In Thomas’ case, this yearning is eased and transformed not through an isolated revelation, but in communion with Jesus and the other disciples. Every disciple then and now reorients herself, recovers her personal path in the warmth of that brotherly/sisterly *koinonia*. It is not that the questions come to an end, nor the search, nor that the uncertainty of faith is ever resolved. Yet each person experiences unconditional welcome when the community mirrors the original features of the Master— of the Servant who embraces and forgives, who refuses to hide his wounds and who repeats the invitation to mission. This is where the sense of faith is revived.

Communal consciousness lies at the cultural roots of our migrant population. This consciousness, like an enchantment, captivates and protects the migrants when they come in contact with the “American way of life” where the ideal seems to be total self-sufficiency. This ideal asserts itself in all situations, whether in the workplace, or whether in making money, even in interpersonal relationships.

Even so, I have met people who incarnate a synthesis of the communal and

individual. They retain a rich communal sense while at the same time displaying the most valuable personal potentialities. But this synthesis proves possible only in communities that permit people to heal not only their own wounds but also each other's.