



During the three years of public life, Jesus set down the foundations of the Church: he gathered his first disciples and associated them with his mission (Mk 3:13-16). He put Peter in charge of the community (Mt 16:18) and made him the guardian of the faith (Lk 22:31) within the new People of God. He made the twelve apostles and the disciples a community of witnesses (Jn 15:16) and promised them the gift of the Spirit who would help them come to know the fullness of the Light which Jesus came to bring into the world (Jn 16:13).

Now, the Lord is risen, and from the pierced side of Jesus, a new people, a new world is born, like the child coming to life in the blood and water flowing from its mother's womb (Jn 19:34). This gospel community, enlightened by the word of Jesus, enlivened by his Spirit, sets out to announce God's marvelous deeds to the ends of the earth and to gather together in unity, the scattered children of God (Jn 11:52).

Two great giants stand out in this evangelization: Peter and Paul. Peter will devote himself in particular to the evangelization of the Jews, while Paul will become the apostle to the Gentiles (Gal 2:7-8).

Luke, the author of the third gospel, writes about this nascent Church in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, which was probably first called Acts of Apostles. If, as in the case of the gospels, earlier accounts of the Acts existed which Luke would have drawn upon to write his text, the harmony achieved in editing these various texts is indeed remarkable since it is very difficult to identify these different texts today.

Certain scholars believe that at the outset the Acts of the Apostles and the third gospel were one and the same text that was only divided up later. One point is certain, however: by the beginning of the second century, the Acts of the Apostles were already a separate text. However, the testimony concerning the beginnings of the Church has come down to us in two different forms: the "current text," coinciding with the majority of ancient manuscripts of Syrian and Egyptian origin, and the said "Western text," which is longer and where the disputes between the Jews and the first Christians are more in evidence.

The Book of the Acts does not follow a rigorous outline. One can, however, pick out some clear-cut divisions in the text which allow us to glimpse Luke's project. Without focusing exclusively on Peter and Paul, Luke devoted the greater part of his work to them. In spite of many exceptions, Peter dominates the first twelve chapters, while Paul dominates the second part of the book.

From the geographical point of view, one can notice that the Acts bring us from Jerusalem, through Judea and Samaria, to Rome, thus following the mission to which Jesus appointed his apostles on ascension day (Acts 1:8). In the first seven chapters we are in Jerusalem, then in chapter 8 and those following, we see—of course, with some exceptions—the Church taking root in Judea, in Samaria and along the coastal plain; from chapter 13 onwards, we accompany Paul to Asia Minor and to Greece and finally, in chapter 28, to Rome, to the Palace of the Emperor, that is to say, to the heart of the pagan world.

There, the Book of the Acts ends abruptly, as if Luke, like the runner whose job is to accompany the Good News of salvation as it is spreading out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, has achieved his goal and thus fulfilled his contract. This in itself is sufficient to remind us that the Acts, no more than the gospels, do not pretend to be a biography of Peter and Paul, or a detailed history of the early Church, but a testimony to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, the Holy Spirit is the veritable actor in the birth of the Church: this is the reason why many commentators, ever since the first Christian centuries, have not hesitated to call this book “The Gospel of the Holy Spirit.” With only slight modification we could use here the words of John in Jn 20:3: “The Spirit has accomplished many other signs which have not been written of in this book. These have been recorded so that you may believe that the Spirit is at work in the Church of Jesus Christ.”

Luke’s intention in the Acts is to highlight, in particular through the diverse preaching of Peter and Paul, how the mystery of Christ and of the Church has been announced and prepared for in the Old Testament, but also how this double mystery—Christ and the Church—fulfills the Old Testament.

In this perspective, Luke readily highlights the parallels between Jesus and his Church, and also between the people of the Old Testament and the Church: by way of example, let us mention the parallels between the death of Stephen and that of Christ, between the journey to Jerusalem of Paul and that of Christ, but also the opposition between the Tower of Babel and Pentecost.

Continuing in this same line of inquiry, *Jerusalem* constantly flows from the pen of Luke, (58 times). As he has done in his gospel, where the Holy City is mentioned 30 times, Luke points to Jerusalem as the place where salvation is accomplished and from where the Good News is to be taken to all nations.

Jesus taken up to heaven

Lk 1:1-4 **1** • In the first part of my work, Theophilus, I wrote of all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ²until the day when he ascended to heaven.

Lk 24:51; 24:49; 6:13 But first he had instructed through the Holy Spirit the apostles he had chosen. ³After his passion, he presented himself to them, giving many signs that he was alive; over a period of forty days he appeared to them and taught them concerning the kingdom of God. ⁴Once when he had been eating with them, he told them, “Do not leave Jerusalem but wait for the fulfillment of the Father’s promise about which I have spoken to you: ⁵John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit within a few days.”

Lk 24:49 Mal 3:23; ⁶When they had come together,

they asked him, “Is it now that you will restore the Kingdom of Israel?”

⁷And he answered, It is not for you to know the time and the steps that the Father has fixed by his own authority.

⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the earth.”

⁹After Jesus said this, he was taken up before their eyes and a cloud hid him from their sight. ¹⁰While they were still looking up to heaven where he went, suddenly, two men dressed in white stood beside them ¹¹and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven, will return in the same way as you have seen him go there.”

Sir 36;
Mk 9:12;
Lk 18:31

Lk 24:
47-48

Lk 24:
50-51;
Dn 7:13;
Lk 9:34

Lk 24:4

• **1.1** Throughout the Book of the Acts, the apostles affirm that they are “witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus” (2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:41; 13:31...). This testimony is not based on vague sentiments or doubtful visions, but on the “proofs” that Jesus gave to his apostles after his resurrection and which are echoed in the gospels.

The reference to the forty days is important. Inspired by the number of weeks—forty—which the child spends in its mother’s womb, the symbolic number forty indicates both the time of trial or growth and that of maturity: it is the time of waiting for new life. During forty days in the desert, Jesus prepared himself for his mission of Savior; during forty days the apostles will prepare themselves for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and for their mission of witness. It is in Jerusalem that the apostles will receive the baptism in the Spirit that will make them into new people. The Spirit that hovered over the waters (Gen 1:2) during the first days of creation, will descend upon them and inaugurate the new dispensation. The Church of which they will be the “pillars” will be first and above all the work of the Holy Spirit. It is in the Spirit that the apostles will find the strength to be witnesses of the Risen One in the very midst of the world.

You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, even to the

ends of the earth. Luke outlines here *the geographic framework* of the Book of Acts (see Introduction to the Acts of the Apostles). At the same time, he demonstrates how the dynamic of the Old Testament is reversed with the death and resurrection of Jesus.

From the first pages of the Book of Genesis, we know that the sky and the earth belong to God: he is their Creator and all belongs to him.

Later with the call of Abraham and the journey of Moses, we discover that in this universe there is one country which is particularly blessed by God, it is the Land of Promise; when David settles in Jerusalem, this city becomes the city of David, and at the same time, the city of God. From then on the Psalmist can say: “God preferred Jerusalem to all the towns of Jacob” (Ps 87:2) and in this Holy City, it is on the Temple Mount that God has prepared his dwelling (1 K 8:29). Thus gradually, according as God walks side by side with his people, lighting up the way with his Word, all eyes become fixed on Jerusalem and on the Temple.

Now, it is when people have destroyed the true Temple (Jn 2:19), the humanity of the Son by nailing him to the cross, that God brings forth life from death, and from then on, a new dynamic will burst forth from Jerusalem towards the other countries of the Promised Land (Judea and Samaria), and from the

The disciples await the Holy Spirit

•¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount called Olives, which is a fifteen-minute walk away.

Lk 6:
14-16

¹³ On entering the city they went to the room upstairs where they were staying. Present there were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James, son of Alphaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas son of James. ¹⁴ All of these together gave themselves to constant prayer. With them were some women and also Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

Lk 8:2;
Mk 15:
40; 3:31;
1Cor 9:5

Matthias elected

•¹⁵ It was during this time that Peter stood up in the midst of the community—about one hundred and twenty in all—¹⁶ and he said,

“Brothers, it was necessary that the Scriptures referring to Judas be fulfilled. The Holy Spirit had spoken through David about the one who would lead the crowd coming to arrest Jesus. ¹⁷ He was one of our number and had been called to share our common ministry.

Lk 22:47

¹⁸ (We know that he bought a field with the reward of his sin; yet he

Mt 27:3

Promised Land to the ends of the earth. Each of the gospels in their own way, finishes with the sending of the disciples. Similarly, from the first pages of the Acts, Jesus reminds his Church of the demands of mission: when the Church, or even when the smallest community ceases to be missionary, she is no longer the Church of Christ.

After Jesus said this, he was taken up before their eyes (v. 9). Jesus multiplied the “proofs” of his resurrection for those whose vocation would be to become witnesses of the risen Christ (v. 3), but now he must let the disciples know the significance of the resurrection. In this final apparition on the day of his ascension, Jesus revealed to them the meaning of his own story: having come from the Father, he returns to the Father but he does not return alone, he brings with him a “captive people” (Eph 4:8) whom he snatches from the power of darkness in order to bring them into his Kingdom of Light (Col 1:13), he goes to prepare a place for us, so that where he is, we may be too (Jn 14:2-3).

For the moment, the disciples are still in this world, where they must bear witness to the new reality of the kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus: a Kingdom which is not like the earthly kingdoms founded on power and money (Lk 22:25-26), but a Kingdom of love, of justice, of peace. This Kingdom is not to be found in the clouds, it is already in our midst (Lk 17:20-21) and it grows each time we let ourselves be guided by the Spirit of God.

• 12. The apostles cannot begin such a difficult mission before they have received the Holy Spirit. They have done everything that depended on them and now can only put

themselves in the hands of God and wait perseveringly in prayer for the time he has fixed.

As John has done in giving us the word of Jesus to his mother, present at the foot of the cross (Jn 19:26-27), Luke here reveals to us the spiritual maternity of Mary. She is there sharing in the longing of the apostles, she is the New Eve, the new mother of all the living (Gen 3:20).

Mary, mother of Jesus, played a decisive role during those days when the apostles tried to reflect together on all they had seen and learned from Jesus, in order to clarify the message they had to give to the world. Mary, only witness of the annunciation and of the private life of Jesus, helped them perceive the mystery of his divine personality.

Luke does not speak about this: from now on Mary keeps herself in the background. Different from those “brothers of Jesus” who long for power in the Church, she is but a praying presence. From that moment the Church has a hierarchy but all those called to receive the Spirit are full members of this community or communion.

• 15. Peter is acting here as head of the primitive Church. The death of Judas has left a vacancy in the “college of apostles” whose twelve members bring to mind the twelve sons of Jacob. Just as the Israel of old never accepted being deprived of one or many of its tribes, so too, Peter, will not permit the group of the Twelve to have one of its members amputated.

Peter will find a way to allow God to make known his choice. We may be surprised today that such an important decision could have been made by casting lots. Is this not a sort of

threw himself headlong to his death, his body burst open and all his bowels spilled out. ¹⁹This event became known to all the people living in Jerusalem and they named that field *Akeldama* in their own language, which means Field of Blood).

²⁰In the book of Psalms it is written: *Let his house become deserted and may no one live in it.* But it is also written: *May another take his office.* ²¹Therefore we must choose someone from among those who were with us during all the time that the Lord Jesus moved about with us, ²²beginning with John's baptism until the day when Jesus was taken away from us. One of these has to become, with us, a witness to his resurrection."

²³Then they proposed two: Joseph, called Barsabbas, also known

as Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴They prayed: "You know, Lord, what is in the hearts of all. Show us, therefore, which of the two you have chosen ²⁵to replace Judas in this apostolic ministry which he deserted to go to the place he deserved."

²⁶Then they drew lots between the two and the choice fell on Matthias who was added to the eleven apostles.

The coming of the Holy Spirit

2 • ¹When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly out of the sky came a sound like a strong rushing wind and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. There appeared ³tongues as if of fire which parted and came to rest upon each one of them. ⁴All were filled with

6:4

4:31;
Jn 3:8Num
11:25

10:46;

washing one's hands of the decision-making process? We must not forget that this episode is happening in a community whose religious culture welcomes signs from God. They know the qualities they would want to see in the candidates and two are eligible. Now the question is which one to choose? They pray to God to make his decision known and promise to accept the outcome. This election process, in the spirit of prayer and of abandonment to God, is it not finally as good as certain election processes, not excluding those used by the cardinals in conclave, where the real challenges to the Church have often been compromised by the dishonest voting of interested parties?

It is good to focus in this passage on the conditions which Peter laid down: *To have followed Jesus from John's baptism until the day when he was taken away from us.*" The Good News begins with the preaching of John and culminates with the ascension (Acts 13:14-31). In this way Mark's is the typical gospel, Matthew and Luke have both added an introduction, the infancy narratives, while John makes use of a prologue to act as a kind of preface. For each of the evangelists, it is the resurrection accounts that dominate their gospels and give them meaning.

Like on so many occasions in the Old Testament (Jacob, Samuel, David...) God again chooses the second and possibly even the

more simple person: let us examine the "calling card" of the first: *Joseph named Barsabbas, also known as Justus* while it is *Matthias*, without any other name or nickname, who is chosen by God.

• **2.1** Pentecost was one of the greatest feasts of the Jewish calendar. Originally an agricultural feast, in the latter centuries of the Old Testament it became the celebration of the giving of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. For this occasion, like for the Passover, many Jews from the countries around the Mediterranean came on pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

It was during the Jewish Passover, which commemorated the liberation from slavery in Egypt, that Jesus, by his own death and resurrection, offered the world freedom from death and sin; it is on the day when the gift of the Law on Sinai is celebrated, the day when God made his covenant with the chosen people, that God now gives his Spirit to the "Israel of God" (Gal 6:16).

That very day the *baptism of fire* announced by John (Lk 3:16) takes place. God sends the Spirit of his Son and, with this, the Church is born. For the Church is not a human institution, or the work of a group of believers; it comes from God's initiative, and God wills that individuals of every nation witness this event.

19:6; Holy Spirit and began to speak other
1Cor 12 languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

5 Staying in Jerusalem were religious Jews from every nation under heaven. 6 When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered, all excited because each heard them speaking in his own language. 7 Full of amazement and wonder, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" 8 How is it that we hear them in our own native language? 9 Here are Parthians, Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to

Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, 11 both Jews and foreigners who accept Jewish beliefs, Cretians and Arabians; and all of us hear them proclaiming in our own language what God, the Savior, does."

12 They were amazed and greatly confused, and they kept asking one another, "What does this mean?" 13 But others laughed and said, These people are drunk.

Peter addresses the crowd

• 14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven and, with a loud voice, addressed them, "Fellow Jews and all foreigners now staying in Jerusalem, listen to what I have to say. 15 These

1Cor
14:23

What happened at Pentecost was as unique as what was accomplished by the resurrection. Nevertheless it follows the pattern of other interventions of God in history. On one hand, the Spirit constantly brings about our apostolic renewals, religious awakenings, and dynamic communities that become the new blood of the Church, which constantly grows old and constantly needs renewal.

The Spirit comes to give life to the Church. It also comes to confirm or affirm the believers. The baptism of fire that the apostles receive is normally conferred on us through confirmation (see commentary on 8:9).

The *rushing wind* is a sign, because *spirit* means both *breath* and *wind* in the Hebrew culture. Inspired by the Spirit, Peter speaks up. He now knows the truth and believes, and this is why he can boldly proclaim it (Jn 15:26 and 16:13).

Each one heard them speaking in his own language. The repetition of this expression on three occasions (vv. 6, 8, 11) is an indication to us that here is a key for understanding this passage. The miracle of Pentecost is not really in the fact that the apostles, all of Palestinian origin, began to speak in foreign languages, but in the fact that all the foreigners heard the proclamation of God's wonderful deeds in their own language: that is the miracle of Pentecost. Many other New Testament texts refer to the "gift of tongues" (Acts 10:46; 19:6; 1 Cor 12; 14:2-19) but here in the Pentecostal text God outlines the basis of all evangelization: those who are called to have faith in Jesus, to become members of the Church, are

not required to renounce their language and their culture, as the Jewish proselytes of old were expected to. On the contrary, God wishes to be praised and blessed by people of all languages and cultures: in this way the diversity of the members in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-13) will be clearly visible for all to see, likewise the gathering together through Jesus and his Spirit of God's scattered children will also be visible (Jn 11:52).

Throughout her history, the Church has tended to forget the miracle of Pentecost when she imposed her language and her culture while evangelizing new peoples. Throughout her history, the Holy Spirit has also warned the Church against such temptations in the persons of apostles who live by the spirit of Pentecost.

• 14. This is the first proclamation of Jesus' resurrection. Peter, once again, aware of his responsibility in the group of the Twelve, speaks on behalf of all. He cites the texts of the Old Testament: Joel, the Psalms, etc. and demonstrates their fulfillment in Jesus and in the nascent Church.

I will pour out my Spirit. The Father sends the Spirit of Jesus to all people; he makes of all people his prophets, his witnesses.

I will perform miracles in the sky... Peter continues quoting the prophet Joel who announces the day of Yahweh, that is to say, in the Old Testament, the day of God's judgement. According to Joel it appears that the people of Israel alone will escape punishment; but Peter expands the text and affirms (v. 39),

people are not drunk as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶Indeed what the prophet Joel spoke about has happened:

Jl 3:1-5 ¹⁷In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on every mortal. Your sons and daughters will speak through the Holy Spirit; your young men will see visions and your old men will have dreams.

¹⁸In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on my servants, both men and women, and they will be prophets.

Am 5:18 ¹⁹I will perform miracles in the sky above and wonders on the earth below. ²⁰The sun will be darkened and the moon will turn red as blood, before the great and glorious Day of the Lord comes.

Rom 10:13; 1Cor 1:2 ²¹And then, whoever calls upon the Name of the Lord will be saved.

6:8; 7:36; 7:3 ²²Fellow Israelites, listen to what I am going to tell you about Jesus of Nazareth. God accredited him and through him did powerful deeds and

wonders and signs in your midst, as you well know. ²³You delivered him to sinners to be crucified and killed, and in this way the purpose of God from all times was fulfilled. ²⁴But God raised him to life and released him from the pain of death, because it was impossible for him to be held in the power of death. ²⁵David spoke of him when he said: *I saw the Lord before me at all times; he is by my side, that I may not be shaken.* ²⁶Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced; my body too will live in hope. ²⁷Because you will not forsake me in the abode of the dead, nor allow your Holy One to experience corruption. ²⁸You have made known to me the paths of life, and your presence will fill me with joy.

4:28

Ps 16:
8-11

²⁹Friends, I don't need to prove that the patriarch David died and was buried; his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰But he knew that God had sworn to him that one of his descendants would sit upon his throne and,

2S 7:2;
Ps
132:11

at the end of his speech, that the salvation which comes from God is promised to all, to those who are near and to those who are afar, to all those represented here by the foreigners of diverse nationality.

God raised him to life. Peter recalls how Jesus showed many signs of love during his public life: in spite of that, or more precisely, because of that, he was delivered into the hands of pagans: how mysterious it is that people reject God's love. More than 700 years before the coming of Jesus, the prophet Hosea was already familiar with this rejection of God's love (Hos 11:1-4) and Jesus, himself, announces it in the parable of the murderous vineyard tenants (Mt 21:33-39). However, God, whose love is more powerful than our sins (Rom 5:20), raised him from the dead and made him the source of salvation for all (vv. 33 and 36).

Repent. Peter uses these words of Jesus at the beginning of his speech (Mt 4:17)—the Church is beginning to fall into the steps of Jesus—now it is no longer a question of receiving the baptism of John the Baptist, which was only a ritual of purification, highlighting

the desire to repent. We must receive baptism "in the Name of Jesus."

What shall we do?... Repent. In those days, to repent and *to be converted* meant to share the life of the infant Church which showed to the nation the way of salvation taught by Jesus. The Church did not appear as a new religion opposed to Judaism, but as a center of more authentic life.

Save yourselves from this crooked generation (v. 40). This means that the entire generation was missing the unique opportunity they were given. For God asked them to take the most decisive step in Sacred History; even Roman oppression could be overcome by a people able to put the Gospel into practice. At the same time Jesus made them discover the love of God the Father for which the whole Bible had prepared them.

Some three thousand were added to their number (v. 41). They already knew of Jesus, but were not committed to him. They were converted by the common action of the Holy Spirit and the apostles. A church in which signs of the Spirit acting could not be seen could not say that Jesus lives in her midst.

Ps 16:10 ³¹ as he was a prophet, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah. So he said that *he would not be left in the region of the dead, nor would his body experience corruption.*

1:8; 5:32
Jn 7:39; 16:7
³² This Messiah is Jesus and we are all witnesses that God raised him to life. ³³ He has been exalted at God's right side and the Father has entrusted the Holy Spirit to him; this Spirit he has just poured upon us as you now see and hear.

Ps 110:1; Lk 20:41-44
³⁴ And look: David did not ascend into heaven, but he himself said: *The Lord said to my Lord: sit at my right side* ³⁵ *until I make your enemies a stool for your feet.* ³⁶ Let Israel then know for sure that God has made Lord and Christ this Jesus whom you crucified."

³⁷ When they heard this, they were deeply troubled. And they asked Peter and the other apostles, "What shall we do, brothers?"

8:16; 10:48; 19:5; 22:16
³⁸ Peter answered: "Each of you must repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven. Then you will

receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise of God was made to you and your children, and to all those from afar whom our God may call."

⁴⁰ With many other words Peter gave the message and appealed to them saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." ⁴¹ So those who accepted his word were baptized; some three thousand persons were added to their number that day.

The first community

• ⁴² They were faithful to the teaching of the apostles, the common life of sharing, the breaking of bread and the prayers.

⁴³ A holy fear came upon all the people, for many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ Now all the believers lived together and shared all their belongings. ⁴⁵ They would sell their property and all they had and distribute the proceeds to others according to their need. ⁴⁶ Each day they met together in the Temple area; they broke bread in their homes; they shared their food

13:38
13:8;
Dt 32:5;
Mt 17:17;
Gal 1:4

4:32;
5:12;
20:7;
Lk 24:35

5:12

• 42. Those who have been baptized feel strongly united by the new faith and long for a communal life. As they gather in private houses and the communities are not too big, they can know each other and share everything.

Luke tells us what they did and we must note the order of priorities:

- first the teaching of the apostles
- then comes Christian fellowship, with more attention to the weak (chap. 4)
- only then may the *breaking of bread*, that is, the Eucharist, be celebrated
- finally common prayers of thanksgiving to prolong the Eucharist.

In some communities today life is lacking because the first point, which is the basis for all the rest, is not given priority.

The Spirit of Jesus comes to us through the Word and the Eucharist: these are the sources of the Church's dynamism. By *the word*, we do not mean the study of the Bible merely to

know the Bible. The Bible helps us realize how God continues to speak to us through the actual achievements of our life, the community and the world.

The expression *breaking of the bread* could mean any Jewish meal that began with a blessing. But very early the Christians reserved this word for reference to the Eucharist that they celebrated remembering the last supper of the Lord (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 10:16).

Joy and simplicity of heart gave witness to the change in their lives and the authenticity of their fraternal sharing. They were deeply reconciled persons.

It was not the naive joy that is easily found in Christian groups who have no thought for the problems of the world. Neither they nor their enemies could ignore that Jesus had taken on the problems of national reconciliation. They were *enjoying the favor of the people* who considered them to be concerned and responsible persons.

with great joy and simplicity of heart; 47 they praised God and won the people's favor. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

4:21;
13:48;
21:20

Peter and John cure a lame man

10:30 **3** • ¹Once when Peter and John were going up to the Temple at three in the afternoon, the hour for prayer, ²a man crippled from birth was being carried in. Every day they would bring him and put him at the temple gate called "Beautiful"; there he begged from those who entered the Temple.

14:8 ³When he saw Peter and John on their way into the Temple, he asked for alms. ⁴Then Peter with John at his side looked straight at him and said, "Look at us." ⁵So he looked at them, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶But Peter said, "I have neither silver nor gold, but what I have I give you: In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, walk!"

4:10;
9:34;
16:18;
19:13

⁷Then he took the beggar by his right hand and helped him up. At once his feet and ankles became firm, ⁸and jumping up he stood on his feet and began to walk. And he went with them into the Temple walking and leaping and praising God.

Lk 5:26;
7:16 ⁹All the people saw him walking and praising God; ¹⁰they recognized him as the one who used to sit begging at the Beautiful Gate of the

Temple, and they were all astonished and amazed at what had happened to him.

¹¹While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, struck with astonishment, came running to them in Solomon's Porch, as it was called. ¹²When Peter saw the people, he said to them,

5:12;
Jn 10:23

"Fellow Israelites, why are you amazed at this? Why do you stare at us as if it was by some power or holiness of our own that we made this man walk? ¹³The God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus whom you handed over to death and denied before Pilate, when even Pilate had decided to release him. ¹⁴You rejected the Holy and Just One, and you insisted that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵You killed the Master of life, but God raised him from the dead and we are witnesses to this. ¹⁶It is his Name, and faith in his Name, that has healed this man whom you see and recognize. The faith that comes through Jesus has given him wholeness in the presence of all of you.

14:15;
10:36

Lk 23:13

5:32;
10:39;
Jn 7:23

¹⁷Yet I know that you acted out of ignorance, as did your leaders. ¹⁸God has fulfilled in this way what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer.

13:27;
17:30;
1Tim 1:13

Lk 24:27

¹⁹Repent, then, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out ²⁰and the time of refreshment may come by the mercy of God, when he

2P 3:12

• **3.1** We might sometimes think that Jesus cured all the sick. This is not true, since he did not heal this cripple who was in the Temple every day. This new sign brings about another proclamation.

Why are you amazed at this? The miracle was done in the *Name of Jesus*, that is, by the Power over every creature that Jesus received from the Father at the time of his resurrection. Jesus was in their midst as the servant of the

Lord (Is 42:1; 52:13), but speaking of his Name was a way of stating his divinity (Mk 16:17; Phil 2:9).

I know that you acted out of ignorance. Yet Peter demands that they admit their guilt. All of us must confess a similar guilt in the injustices and crimes of our times.

He must remain in heaven (v. 21). The coming of Jesus inaugurated the "last days" in which the Gospel reconciles humanity with

sends the Messiah appointed for you, Jesus. ²¹For he must remain in heaven until the time of the universal restoration which God spoke of long ago through his holy prophets.

²²Moses foretold this when he said: *The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall listen to him in all that he says to you.* ²³Whoever does not listen to that prophet is to be cut off from among his people.

²⁴In fact, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel onward, have announced the events of these days. ²⁵You are the children of the prophets and heirs of the covenant that God gave to your ancestors when he said to Abraham: *All the families of the earth will be blessed through your descendant.* ²⁶It is to you first that God sends his Servant; he raised him to life to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”

Peter and John are arrested

4 • ¹While Peter and John were still speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them. ²They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were

teaching the people and proclaiming that resurrection from the dead had been proved in the case of Jesus.

³Since it was already evening, they arrested them and put them in custody until the following day. ⁴But despite this, many of those who heard the Message believed and their number increased to about five thousand.

⁵The next day, the Jewish leaders, elders and teachers of the Law assembled in Jerusalem. ⁶Annas, the High Priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and all who were of the high priestly class were there. ⁷They brought Peter and John before them and began to question them, “How did you do this? Whose name did you use?”

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke up, “Leaders of the people! Elders! ⁹It is a fact that we are being examined today for a good deed done to a cripple. How was he healed? ¹⁰You and all the people of Israel must know that this man stands before you cured through the Name of Jesus Christ the Nazarean. You had him crucified, but God raised him from the dead. ¹¹Jesus is *the stone rejected by you the builders which has become the cornerstone.* ¹²There is no salvation in

God, and changes human consciousness thus speeding up the course of history which, in the end, forces humankind to solve their problems together. Humanity is on its way to the coming of Christ and the *restoration* of the world, namely, the Resurrection.

He sends him to bless (v. 26). This blessing comes to those who accept reconciliation with God upon seeing the love he revealed to us in Jesus. The blessing is not for us alone, rather, through us—the people of God—it reaches *all the families of the earth*.

• **4.1** The Jewish leaders judge Peter and John. The Holy Spirit judges the leaders of the Jews.

These leaders believe they possess the truth

because they are learned and have authority. It is impossible for them to back down before ordinary men who refute their statements. Meanwhile Peter points out how strange it is to be arrested for having healed a sick man (v. 8).

These leaders were *Sadducees* and they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead: Acts 23:6.

This text suggests that all of us can be the witnesses of Christ and of the truth, if we are determined to be involved. Oftentimes, because we only rely on our own strength instead of counting on the Spirit of Christ, we remain silent before our co-workers or our leaders.

What we have seen and heard (v. 20). It is John speaking: see 1 John 1:1.

Mt 17:11; 19:28; Lk 1:70

Dt 18:15; Lk 9:35

Gen 22:18; Rom 9:4; Eph 2:12

23:6; Lk 20:27

Lk 3:2; Jn 18:13

3:12; Lk 20:2

Lk 12:11; 21:13

Ps 118:22; Lk 20:17; Rom 9:33; 1P 2:4

Mt 1:21 anyone else, for there is no other Name given to humankind all over the world by which we may be saved.”

Lk 10:21; 1Cor 1:27 13 They were astonished at the boldness of Peter and John, considering that they were uneducated and untrained men. They recognized, also, that they had been with Jesus, 14 but, as the man who had been cured stood beside them, they could make no reply.

Jn 11:47 15 So they ordered them to leave the council room while they consulted with one another. 16 They asked, “What shall we do with these men? Everyone who lives in Jerusalem knows that a remarkable sign has been given through them, and we cannot deny it. 17 But to stop this from spreading any further among the people, let us warn them never again to speak to anyone in the name of Jesus.” 18 So they called them back and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

5:29 19 But Peter and John answered them, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s eyes for us to obey you rather than God. 20 We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.” 21 Then the council threatened them once more and let them go. They could find no way of punishing them because of the people who glorified God for what had happened, 22 for the man who had been miraculously healed was over forty years old.

1Jn 1: 1-4

Lk 19:48; Acts 2:47; 3:8; 10:46

The prayer of the community

• 23 As soon as Peter and John were set free, they went to their

friends and reported what the chief priests and elders had said to them.

24 When they heard it, they raised their voices as one and called upon God, “Sovereign Lord, maker of heaven and earth, of the sea and everything in them, 25 you have put these words in the mouth of David, our father and your servant, through the Holy Spirit: *Why did the pagan nations rage and the people conspire in folly?* 26 *The kings of the earth were aligned and the princes gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah.*

Ps 2:1-2

27 For indeed in this very city Herod with Pontius Pilate, and the pagans together with the people of Israel conspired against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. 28 Thus, indeed, they brought about whatever your powerful will had decided from all time would happen. 29 But now, Lord, see their threats against us and enable your servants to speak your word with all boldness. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and to work signs and wonders through the Name of Jesus your holy servant.”

2:22

31 When they had prayed, the place where they were gathered together shook, and they were all filled with Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God boldly.

2:1-4

An attempt to share everything

• 32 The whole community of believers was one in heart and mind. No one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but rather they shared all things in common. 33 With great power the apostles bore wit-

2:44-45

• 23. We can meditate on the way this church gathering develops: an event (the arrest) is shared by all. For them this confrontation with the authorities is something new. They connect what happened with the Word of God. In this case they refer to Psalm 2; then

they begin common prayer and ask for courage to continue to do God’s works.

• 32. Here we might understand that this sharing had become a rule in the early Church. In fact, if we pay attention to 4:36 and 5:4 it

ness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, for all of them were living in an exceptional time of grace.

Lk 18:28 ³⁴There was no needy person among them, for those who owned land or houses, sold them and brought the proceeds of the sale. ³⁵And they laid it at the feet of the apostles who distributed it according to each one's need. ³⁶This is what a certain Joseph did. He was a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas, meaning: "The encouraging one." ³⁷He sold a field which he owned and handed the money to the apostles.

The fraud of Ananias and Sapphira

Jos 7:1 **5** • ¹Another man named Ananias, in agreement with his wife Sapphira, likewise sold a piece of land; ²with his wife's knowledge he put aside some of the proceeds, and the rest he turned over to the apostles.

³Then Peter said to him, "Ananias, how is it that you let Satan fill your heart and why do you intend to deceive the Holy Spirit by keeping some of the proceeds of your land for yourself? ⁴Who obliged you to sell it? And after it was sold, could you not have kept all the money? How could you think of such a thing? You have not deceived us but God."

⁵Upon hearing these words, Ananias fell down and died. Great fear came upon all who heard of it; ⁶the young men stood up, wrapped his body and carried it out for burial.

⁷About three hours later Ananias's wife came but she was not aware of what had happened. ⁸Peter challenged her, "Tell me whether you sold that piece of land for this price?" She said, "Yes, that was the price." ⁹Peter replied, "How could you two agree to put the Holy Spirit to the test? Those who buried your hus-

becomes clear that everyone admired what some of them did.

Jesus did not ask for this; yet they were doing it, inspired by the desire of every true believer to remove all divisions between brothers and sisters, especially those created by money. Placing everything in common, however, requires not only a spirit of detachment, but also a sense of responsibility and organization. The believers in Jerusalem lived at a time when work and foresight were not very important, and they soon consumed what they had, without being concerned about working, and eventually became the "poor of Jerusalem." Paul was to organize collections in other churches in order to assist them (Gal 2:10; Rom 15:25; 2 Cor 8).

• **5.1** As children many of us were taught about the wonders God did in the past, as if God only acted in those days. The Jews of that time thought exactly the same way. The Bible spoke of the time of Moses when those who rebelled against God's prophet were killed by divine intervention (Num 12:1; 16:1; 17:16). God continues to work in the Christian community, and the ordinary believers of Jerusalem suddenly discover that Peter, the fisher-

man, is not inferior to Moses. See also Acts 13:11; 1 Cor 11:30.

The couple's sin does not consist in having kept part of their goods. Nobody was forcing them to sell their property and to give the money to the community. They wanted to deceive the apostles and give the impression they were donating everything, when in fact they were not.

We must be very careful when we speak of God's punishment. For a Christian, the only punishment is to be forever separated from God. Death itself does not mean that God wants to punish us. Yet the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira served as a warning and a sign for the others.

Here the word *church* appears. Its exact meaning is "the assembly gathered by God," and before Jesus' time, the Jews used it to mean the new people that God was going to form in the messianic age. The believers continue to be proud of being Jewish, of being the people of God; nevertheless, little by little, the Holy Spirit separates them from the official community. They are already aware that they are the new people (Ps 22:32) gathered by God. The Church still means only the Christian community of Jerusalem. As other com-

band are at the door and they will carry you out as well.”

¹⁰With that, she fell dead at his feet. The young men came in, found her dead and carried her out for burial beside her husband. ¹¹And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of it.

9:31;
11:26

Jn 10:23

• ¹²Many miraculous signs and wonders were done among the people through the hands of the apostles. The believers, of one accord, used to meet in Solomon’s Porch. ¹³None of the others dared to join them, but the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴So an ever increasing number of men and women, believed in the Lord. ¹⁵The people carried the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and on mats, so that when Peter passed by, at least his shadow might fall on some of them. ¹⁶The people gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those who were troubled by unclean spirits, and all of them were healed.

19:11

Lk 6:17

The apostles arrested again

• ¹⁷The High Priest and all his supporters, that is the party of the Sad-

ducees, became very jealous of the apostles; ¹⁸so they arrested them and had them thrown into the public jail. ¹⁹But an angel of the Lord opened the door of the prison during the night, brought them out, and said to them, ²⁰“Go and stand in the Temple court and tell the people the whole of this living message.” ²¹Accordingly they entered the Temple at dawn and resumed their teaching.

3:15;
11:18;
4:2

When the High Priest and his supporters arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin, that is the full Council of the elders of Israel. They sent word to the jail to have the prisoners brought in. ²²But when the Temple guards arrived at the jail, they did not find them inside, so they returned with the news, ²³“We found the prison securely locked and the prison guards at their post outside the gate, but when we opened the gate, we found no one inside.”

²⁴Upon hearing these words, the captain of the Temple guard and the high priests were baffled, wondering where all of this would end. ²⁵Just then someone arrived with the report, “Look, those men whom you put in prison are standing in the

munities arise—other churches—“the Church” will refer to the entire people of God.

• 12. *So an ever-increasing number of men and women, believed in the Lord (v. 14).* All the Jews believed in God who spoke through the prophets. It was easy for them to believe in the prophets of the past after the religious authorities acknowledged them and placed their warnings in all the books of the Bible. But it was quite a different thing to recognize Jesus as the prophet that God had sent them but whom they had rejected. The text states that to believe in the Lord and join the community are two inseparable steps. A person cannot belong to Jesus without belonging to the new people he has brought to life through water and the Spirit.

Verses 15-16 do not hesitate to compare Peter to Jesus.

• 17. Could this confrontation of the apostles with the rulers of the people be similar to what happens today in many countries when the Church denounces violations of human rights?

There are many Christians who say: it is not the same, since the apostles in their time were persecuted for proclaiming Jesus; whereas now, only Christians involved in politics are punished.

This, however, is not true. In Jesus’ day, the Jewish people were both dominated and divided. Jesus spoke as a totally free man, teaching a way towards freedom, which today we would call non-violent action. The authorities did away with him to defend the security of their nation (Jn 11:48) and their own political system. For the disciples of Jesus, to be converted meant to acknowledge complicity with those who put Jesus to death and to take the

Temple, teaching the people.”²⁶ Then the captain went off with the guards and brought them back, but without any show of force, for fear of being stoned by the people.

²⁷ So they brought them in and made them stand before the Council and the High Priest questioned them,

4:18 ²⁸ “We gave you strict orders not to preach such a Savior; but you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend charging us with the killing of this man.”²⁹ To this Peter and the apostles replied, “Better for us to obey God rather than any human authority!

10:40;
13:29;
Gal 3:13;
Dt 21:23
15:28 ³⁰ The God of our ancestors raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a wooden post. ³¹ God set him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to grant repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. ³² We are witnesses to all these things, as well as the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.”

• ³³ When the Council heard this, they became very angry and wanted to kill them. ³⁴ But one of them, a

Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law highly respected by the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin. He ordered the men to be taken outside for a few minutes³⁵ and then he spoke to the assembly.

“Fellow Israelites, consider well what you intend to do to these men. ³⁶ For some time ago Theudas came forward, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men joined him. But he was killed and all his followers were dispersed or disappeared. ³⁷ After him, Judas the Galilean appeared at the time of the census and persuaded many people to follow him. But he too perished and his whole following was scattered. ³⁸ So, in this present case, I advise you to have nothing to do with these men. Leave them alone. If their project or activity is of human origin, it will destroy itself. ³⁹ If, on the other hand, it is from God, you will not be able to destroy it and you may indeed find yourselves fighting against God.”

Lk 20:4

The Council let themselves be persuaded. ⁴⁰ They called in the

path indicated by him. Since they were living among oppressors and resentful people, this was a very dangerous road (Lk 21:12-16).

In fact, when the priests judged Peter and John, they only demanded that they break away from this man (Jesus) whom they had legally condemned.

Proclaiming Jesus means preaching universal reconciliation (Eph 2:14), which is achieved at all levels of human life, including the economic and political. The Church would not be following Christ, nor would it be proclaiming Jesus as the only Savior (v. 31), if it refused to be concerned that entire nations are condemned to die slowly through lack of food, education, and health. This critical concern, however, would not be Christian preaching if it did not convince us to believe in the saving plan of God.

• 33. Gamaliel was one of the most renowned among the masters of the Law. Here

we see the open mind of this old Jewish teacher who knows that God's ways are not always the ways of humans.

If their project or activity is of human origin (v. 38). Jesus had said something similar (Mt 15:13). Yet that does not seem evident. Are we not aware of many false doctrines that last? If they have lasted for centuries, perhaps it is due to the fact that in spite of the error and the evil they sow, they contain useful or necessary principles for a given time, or for certain human groups. Perhaps they make very important statements that the Church should proclaim but cannot or does not want to do. Experience shows that the majority of humans are not ready to embrace the Christian faith: must God abandon them because of that? Can we, who have Christ, say with certitude that such and such a one is not “the prophet.” Maybe God's will is that he be the prophet of a certain group and help them in their searching for God (Acts 17:27).

apostles and had them whipped, and ordered them not to speak again of Jesus Savior. Then they set them free.

21:13;
1P 4:13

⁴¹The apostles went out from the Council rejoicing that they were considered worthy to suffer disgrace for the sake of the Name. ⁴²Day after day, both in the Temple and in people's homes, they continued to teach and to proclaim that Jesus was the Messiah.

The choosing of the seven

9:29

6[•] ¹In those days, as the number of disciples grew, the so-called *Hellenists* complained against the so-called *Hebrews*, because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ²So the Twelve summoned the whole body of disciples together and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God to serve at tables. ³So, friends,

Gamaliel was Paul's teacher in Jerusalem for doubtless three or four years, a little after these events (Acts 22:3). Paul's conversion will be providentially prepared through contact with this open and sincere man, and equally so through the death of Stephen (7:54-60).

• **6.1** Jesus did not spell out for his apostles how they were supposed to organize the Church. And a conflict arose between two social groups. The Jews, called Hebrews, had never left their land and they spoke Aramaic. The Hellenists were those who had lived abroad and who usually spoke Greek. They may have followed the Essene movement and refused to participate in Temple rituals. They felt uncomfortable with the liturgy and community life and their frustrations were growing. In fact, the apostles identified more readily with the Hebrews and it became necessary to give some autonomy to the Hellenists with their own people being in charge. This was probably the birth of a Greek-speaking church, with a Greek liturgy.

The community chose seven men. Since their authority had to come from Christ, it had to be passed on by the apostles.

The candidates must be *filled with faith and the Holy Spirit*, because they are not only

choose from among yourselves seven respected men full of Spirit and wisdom, that we may appoint them to this task. ⁴As for us, we shall give ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word."

18:17-26

2:42;
20:24;
21:19

⁵The whole community agreed and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and Holy Spirit; Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenus and Nicolaus of Antioch who was a proselyte. ⁶They presented these men to the apostles who first prayed over them and then laid hands upon them.

Num
27:18

⁷The Word of God continued to spread, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly and even many priests accepted the faith.

2:41

The story of Stephen

• ⁸Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous

entrusted with material services. And even if it were only for material services the Church would have much to suffer from competent administrators who lacked the Spirit of the Gospel. Were these seven men the first deacons? Luke mentions nothing beyond service, and "deacon" denotes servant, usually steward. In fact, this term, "deacons," will from the start give the meaning of every ministry in the Church: ministry means "service" (1 Cor 12:15). Ministers are at the service of the community assembled by the Spirit to witness to the salvation given by Jesus. All through the centuries, the ministers of the Church would be tempted to misuse the role entrusted to them for the good of the community. Many will take advantage of their "service" to put themselves over the community: they will let others serve and honor them and will not hesitate to be called princes of the Church. What is true for those called to a high rank in the hierarchy is equally true for all those priests or lay people entrusted with lesser responsibilities: all must remember the words of Jesus (Lk 22:24-27).

• 8. Philip will be mentioned in Acts 8:5 and 21:8. Stephen is the only one remembered here.

signs among the people. ⁹Some persons then came forward, who belonged to the so-called Synagogue of Freedmen from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia. ¹⁰They argued with Stephen but they could not match the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke. ¹¹As they were unable to face the truth, they bribed some men to say, "We heard him speak against Moses and against God."

Lk 21:15 ¹²So they stirred up the people, the elders and the teachers of the Law; they took him by surprise, seized him and brought him before the Council. ¹³Then they produced false witnesses who said, "This man never stops speaking against our Holy Place and the Law. ¹⁴We even heard him say that Jesus the Nazarean will destroy our Holy Place and

change the customs which Moses handed down to us." ¹⁵And all who sat in the Council fixed their eyes on him, and his face appeared to them like the face of an angel.

7 ¹So the High Priest asked him: "Is it true?" He answered, "Brothers and fathers, listen to me.

²The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he went to live in Haran. And he said to him: ³Leave your land and your relatives and go to the land which I will show you. ⁴So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God made him move to this land in which you now dwell. ⁵And there he did not give him anything that was his own, not even the

Gen 12:1

Being a Hellenist (see previous paragraph), Stephen did not share the blind faith of the Jewish people in their Temple and its rituals. He understood that the Church had to become free from the patterns of the past and move away from the Jews, if they refused to believe.

Stephen's long discourse before the Sanhedrin (the Great Council) is an outstanding summary of the Old Testament. It emphasizes the increasing initiatives of God who calls, gives, promises, corrects and saves. Confronting this untiring love is the permanent rebellion of Israel who despises God and rejects those he sends. The prophet Hosea, eight centuries before Christ, already expressed the drama of the rejected love of God by his people (Hos 11:1-4). Stephen proclaims it again: this drama reached its culmination when Jesus, the Son-of-God-made-man, was nailed to the cross (Acts 2:23; 3:15; 4:10).

Stephen dies as Christ did. He becomes the first martyr (*martyr* means *witness*). He is a witness to Christ because he proclaims him, but even more so because he does as Christ did, he forgives his murderers.

Like Peter after Pentecost, Stephen still hopes for a conversion of the Jewish people: a minority at least will be converted. This hope will fade in time with the persecutions raised against the Church. The murder of Stephen would be the first sign leading the converted Jews to understand that apostolic work must

be undertaken beyond the frontiers of the Jewish fortress.

Later, when it becomes clear that the Jewish community has rejected the Gospel, Paul will strive to build among pagan nations a network of communities, a new people of God. Then Paul and the other apostles will search for all those who, in any nation, have been predestined by God. They see the Church as a people of "saints."

However, it again appears that many in the Church are not converted. As soon as the community grows and organizes itself, all the defects Jesus denounced in the Jewish Synagogue take place among the Christians and in the structures of the Church.

You always resist the Holy Spirit. This was and remains true in the Church that enjoys the assistance of the Spirit. The people of God always tend to take on the criteria and aims of any human group. Peace with those in political power, security for the future, unity and strength for the Christian organizations are more attractive than the words of the Gospel: sell all your belongings, preach on the rooftops, go to the poor, do not be called "father."

The only way to escape from this return to "the Synagogue" is to do what the first Christians did after Stephen's death: leave our beloved nest for the mission of proclaiming the whole Gospel.

smallest portion of land to put his foot on, but promised to give it to him in possession and to his descendants, though he had no child. ⁶So God spoke: 'Your descendants shall live in a strange land, they shall be enslaved and maltreated for four hundred years. ⁷So I shall call the nation which they serve as slaves to render an account for it. They will come out and worship me in this place.'

⁸He made with him the covenant of circumcision. And so, at the birth of his son Isaac, Abraham circumcised him on the eighth day. Isaac did the same to Jacob, and Jacob to the twelve patriarchs.

⁹The patriarchs envied Joseph so they sold him into Egypt. But God was with him. ¹⁰He rescued him from all his afflictions, granted him wisdom and made him please Pharaoh king of Egypt, who appointed him governor of Egypt and of the whole of his household. ¹¹Then there was famine in all the land of Egypt and Canaan; it was a great misery and our ancestors did not have anything to eat. ¹²Upon learning that there was wheat in Egypt, Jacob sent our ancestors there on their first visit. ¹³On the second visit, Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Pharaoh came to know the family of Joseph. ¹⁴Joseph commanded that his father Jacob be brought to him with the whole of his family of seventy-five persons. ¹⁵Jacob then went down to Egypt where he and our ancestors died. ¹⁶They were transferred to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor at Shechem.

¹⁷As the time of promise drew near, which God had made to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt ¹⁸until came another

king who did not know Joseph. ¹⁹Dealing cunningly with our race, he forced our ancestors to abandon their newborn infants and let them die. ²⁰At that time Moses was born, and God looked kindly on him. For three months he was nursed in the home of his father; ²¹and when they abandoned him, Pharaoh's daughter took him and raised him as her own son. ²²So Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. He was mighty in word and deed. ²³And when he was forty years old, he wanted to visit his own people, the Israelites. ²⁴When he saw one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and killed the Egyptian. ²⁵He thought his kinsfolk would understand that God was sending him to them as a liberator, but they did not understand. ²⁶On the following day, he came to them as they were fighting and tried to reconcile them, saying: 'You are brothers, why do you hurt each other?' ²⁷At that moment, the one who was injuring his companion rebuffed him saying: 'Who appointed you as our leader and judge? ²⁸Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' ²⁹When Moses heard this, he fled and went to live as a stranger in the land of Midian where he had two sons.

³⁰After forty years an angel appeared to him in the desert of Mount Sinai in the flame of a burning bush. ³¹Moses was astonished at the vision. And as he approached to look at it, he heard the voice of the Lord: ³²'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' Moses was filled with fear and did not dare look at it. ³³But the Lord said to him: Take off your sandals for the place where you stand is holy ground. ³⁴I have seen the affliction of my people in Egypt and heard them

Gen 15: 13-14

Gen 17:10

Gen 37

Gen 45

1:7

2:11-15

2:13-14

3:1-2

3:6

3:5

weeping, and I have come down to free them. And now, get up! I am sending you to Egypt.'

3:7-8 ³⁵This Moses whom they rejected saying: 'Who appointed you leader and judge?' God sent as leader and liberator with the assistance of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶He led them out, performing signs and wonders in Egypt, at the Red Sea and in the desert for forty years. ³⁷This Moses is the one who said to the Israelites: 'God will give you a prophet like me from among your own people.' ³⁸This is the one who in the Assembly in the desert became the mediator between the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai and our ancestors; and he received the words of life that he might communicate them to us.

Dt 18:18 ³⁹But him our ancestors refused to obey, they rejected him and turned their hearts to Egypt, saying to Aaron: ⁴⁰'Give us gods to lead us since we do not know what has happened to that Moses who brought us out of Egypt.' ⁴¹So in those days, they fashioned a calf, offered sacrifices to their idol and rejoiced in the work of their hands. ⁴²So God departed from them and let them worship the stars of heaven, as it is written in the Book of the Prophets: 'People of Israel, did you offer me burnt offerings and sacrifices for forty years in the desert?' ⁴³No, you carried instead the tent of Moloch and the star of the god Rehan, images you made to worship, for this I will banish you farther than Babylon.'

Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2; 19:1 ⁴⁴Our ancestors had the Tent of Meeting in the desert, for God had directed Moses to build it according to the pattern he had seen. ⁴⁵Our ancestors received it and brought it under the command of Joshua into the lands of the pagans that they

conquered and whom God expelled before them. They kept it until the days of David ⁴⁶who found favor with God and asked him to let him build a house for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷However, it was Solomon who built that temple.

⁴⁸In reality, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands as the Prophet says: ⁴⁹*Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool. What house will you build for me, says the Lord, how could you give me a dwelling place?* ⁵⁰*Was it not I who made all these things?*

⁵¹But you are a stubborn people, you hardened your hearts and closed your ears. You have always resisted the Holy Spirit just as your fathers did. ⁵²Was there a prophet whom your ancestors did not persecute? They killed those who announced the coming of the Just One whom you have now betrayed and murdered, ⁵³you who received the Law through the angels but did not fulfill it."

⁵⁴When they heard this reproach, they were enraged and they gnashed their teeth against Stephen. ⁵⁵But he, full of the Holy Spirit, fixed his eyes on heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus at God's right hand, ⁵⁶so he declared: "I see the heavens open and the Son of Man at the right hand of God."

⁵⁷But they shouted and covered their ears with their hands and rushed together upon him. ⁵⁸They brought him out of the city and stoned him, and the witnesses laid down their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹As they were stoning him, Stephen prayed saying: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰Then he knelt down and said in a loud voice: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he died.

2S 7:12;
Acts
17:24;
19:26;
Mk
14:58;
Heb 9:11

Is 66:1-2

Jer 9:25

Gal 3:19;
Heb 2:2

Dn 7:13

Heb
13:12

Dt 17:7

Lk 23:46;
Ps 31:6

11:19 **8**[•] ¹Saul was there, approving his murder. This was the beginning of a great persecution against the Church in Jerusalem. All, except the apostles, were scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria. ²Devout men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³Saul meanwhile was trying to destroy the Church; he entered house after house and dragged off men and women and had them put in jail.

22:4;
1Cor
15:9;
Gal 1:13;
Phil 3:6

Philip proclaims the word in Samaria

⁴At the same time those who were scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵Philip went down to a town of Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. ⁶All the people paid close attention to what Philip said as they listened to him and saw the miraculous signs that he did. ⁷For in cases of possession, the unclean spirits came out shrieking loudly. Many people who were paralyzed or crippled were healed. ⁸So there was great joy in that town.

6:5;
21:8

Simon the magician

⁹A certain man named Simon had come to this town, practicing magic. He held the Samaritans spell-

bound and passed himself off as a very important person. ¹⁰All the people, from the last to the greatest, put their trust in him, saying, "This is the Power of God, the Great One." ¹¹And they followed him because he had held them under the spell of his magic for a long time. ¹²But when they came to believe Philip who announced to them the Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ as Savior, both men and women were baptized.

¹³Simon himself believed and was baptized, and would not depart from Philip. He was astonished when he saw the miraculous signs and wonders that happened.

¹⁴Now, when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the Samaritans had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. ¹⁵They went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶for he had not as yet come down upon any of them since they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷So Peter and John laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

11:1

10:44

¹⁸When Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them

• **8.1** The death of Stephen leads to a resurrection. Instead of Stephen, the Church will have a new apostle in Saul who, after his conversion, will become "St Paul." So God heard the prayer of Stephen for his murderers.

The illegal execution of Stephen *unleashes the persecution* against the Hellenist Christians. The apostles and others in the Hebrew group were not persecuted, because they were considered loyal to the Jewish religion and traditions.

Concerning Saul's attitude, see what he himself will say later in Galatians 1:13.

• **4.** The persecuted Christians proclaim their faith and start Christian communities in Samaria.

Evangelization brings happiness: God reveals himself, and through his Spirit he heals

bodies and hearts. God becomes present. What a marvelous and moving thing! Joy, rather than fear and sectarianism, will always surround authentic Christians.

• **9.** Who is the most important person in this passage? Simon? No: it is the Holy Spirit.

Philip is one of the *seven*. He baptizes but he cannot communicate the gifts of the Spirit.

Baptism and the laying on of hands are the two stages of Christian initiation; they refer to two different aspects of life in the church. Baptism is the renewal of the individual through faith. While, *the laying on of hands* expresses the transmission of the Spirit in an uninterrupted way, beginning with those who received it at Pentecost.

This laying of hands (which has become confirmation in today's Church) was then usu-

money ¹⁹ saying, "Give me also this power, so that anyone upon whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

Jn 4:10

²⁰ Peter replied, "May you and your money perish for thinking that the Gift of God could be bought with money! ²¹ You cannot share in this since you do not understand the things of God. ²² Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours and pray to the Lord that you may be forgiven such a wrong way of thinking; ²³ I see you are poisoned with bitterness and in the grip of sin." ²⁴ Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that none of these things you spoke of will happen to me."

Dt 29:17

²⁵ Peter and John gave their testimony and spoke the word of the Lord. And they went back to Jerusalem, bringing the Good News to many Samaritan villages along the way.

Philip baptizes the Ethiopian

• ²⁶ An angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south towards the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, the desert road." ²⁷ So he set out and it happened that an Ethiopian was passing along that way. He was an official in charge of the treasury of the queen of the Ethiopians; he had come on pilgrimage to Jerusalem ²⁸ and was on his way home. He was sitting in his carriage and reading the prophet Isaiah.

²⁹ The Spirit said to Philip, "Go and catch up with that carriage." ³⁰ So Philip ran up and heard the man reading the prophet Isaiah; and he asked, Do you really understand what you are reading? The Ethiopian replied, ³¹ "How can I, unless someone explains it to me?" He then invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. ³² This was the passage of Scripture he was reading:

Is 53:
7-8;
1P 2:24

ally followed by these manifestations we read of in the Acts (19:6) and in Paul (1 Cor 12 and 14). The spectacular aspect of these gifts is often what impresses us most; they were part of a global experience that is still given in one way or another to those who have surrendered to the Spirit.

Simon, a magician, quack or hypnotist, gave Peter the opportunity to condemn a false understanding of spiritual gifts. Simon thought the apostles were more powerful magicians than he was, and wanted to buy the power of working certain miracles. Peter gives us to understand that looking for miracles is clearly not the way to prepare for receiving the Spirit. In any case, such things are not bought.

The manifestations of the Spirit are not always like the ones mentioned in Acts (see Acts 19:6 and 1 Cor 12). This is because God adapts his gifts to the needs of the Church.

Communities of simple, poor people are those that receive more gifts of healing for the sick. Because they lack normal resources, God becomes present. Prayer groups receive the gift of tongues, which is one of the gifts that strengthen piety. The gift of prophecy manifests itself in various ways according to context. Where faith leans heavily on the certainty

of divine justice and the fear of God, we see predictions and revelations of the secrets of the heart. Whereas, among those with a more rational and intellectual bent, the prophet is often characterized by the gift of speaking with assurance and the ability to stress a point in such a way that the community or individuals recognize the voice of God.

The Spirit continues to be at work in many believers who, perhaps, neither speak in tongues nor work healings, but act under the inspiration of the Spirit. They produce the 'fruits of the Spirit' (Gal 5:22-24) and are thus authentic witnesses of Jesus.

Baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus (v. 16). See the note on 19:5 on that subject.

• 26. Note how the Holy Spirit leads Philip towards a man who was neither a Jew nor a Samaritan, the first person of another race to receive the Gospel.

The Ethiopian who is baptized is simply a man who 'fears the Lord.' This is the way they referred to people of other races who were attracted to the religion of the Jews and to faith in the one God. Without following all the Jewish customs, they read the Bible and liked to take part in the Jewish ceremonies.

He was led like a sheep to be slaughtered; like a lamb that is dumb before the shearer, he did not open his mouth. ³³ *He was humbled and deprived of his rights. Who can speak of his descendants? For he was uprooted from the earth.*

³⁴ The official asked Philip, "Tell me, please, does the prophet speak of himself or of someone else?"

Lk 24:27

³⁵ Then Philip began to tell him the Good News of Jesus, using this text of Scripture as his starting point.

³⁶ As they traveled down the road they came to a place where there was some water. Then the Ethiopian official said, Look, here is water; what is to keep me from being baptized?" (³⁷)

10:47

³⁸ Then he ordered the carriage to stop; both Philip and the Ethiopian went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord took Philip away. The Ethiopian saw him no more, but he continued on his way full of joy.

1K 18:12

⁴⁰ Philip found himself at Azotus, and he went about announcing the Good News in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

10:1

Saul meets Jesus

9 ¹ Meanwhile Saul considered nothing but violence and death for the disciples of the Lord. ² He went to the High Priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues of Damascus that would authorize him to arrest and bring to Jerusalem anyone he might find, man or woman, belonging to the Way.

22:5-16;
26:10-18;
Gal 1:
12-17
22:5;
28:21

³ As he traveled along and was approaching Damascus, a light from the sky suddenly flashed around him. "He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?" ⁵ And he asked, Who are you, Lord? The voice replied, I am Jesus whom you persecute. ⁶ Now get up and go into the city; there you will be told what you are to do."

16:17;
18:251Cor 9:1;
15:8

Lk 10:16

⁷ The men who were traveling with

The conversation with Philip begins on the basis of a text from Isaiah 53:7. This poem, called *Servant of the Lord*, speaks of a just man unjustly condemned who, through his sufferings, atones for the sins of all humankind. In this text the apostles saw one of the passages which best prefigured Christ: see commentary on Mark 14:24 and 1 Peter 2:24-25. Isaiah's poem concludes with a veiled reference to the resurrection of the "Servant of the Lord." It is marvelous to see how Philip can give a testimony of the Resurrection with such conviction that the Ethiopian believes in him.

- 37. Verse 37 is absent from most old sources. It says: And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

- 9.1 This is a decisive event in the beginning of the Church. Christ comes in person to win over the fiercest persecutor of the Christians.

The conversion of Saul, who will become Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, is also found in Acts 22 and 26.

It would be wrong to present Paul as an evil man who finally finds the right path. As shown in Acts 22:3-4; Galatians 1:14 and Philippians 3:4-11, Paul from his youth felt the need to dedicate himself to the service of God. This is why he went to Jerusalem to study the Law, that is, religion, with the best teachers of his day. His interest in the things of God made him uninterested in looking for a wife: he did not marry. To this young man, dependable and responsible, the Jews entrusted the difficult task of eliminating from their communities the new and suspicious doctrine of the Christians. Paul is in charge of the repression of Christ's followers and he does this in a very harsh way, for the good of his religion.

Why do you persecute me? (v. 4) Who is this *Lord* who calls me a persecutor, when my only ambition is to serve God? Until that time Paul felt good, like the Pharisee of the parable (Lk 18:9), and thanked God for having made him a responsible, dependable and active believer. Now, faced with the light of Christ, he discovers that his merits and services are of no use to God; his faith is mainly human fanati-

him stood there speechless: they had heard the sound, but could see no one. ⁸Saul got up from the ground and, opening his eyes, he could not see. They took him by the hand and brought him to Damascus. ⁹He was blind and he did not eat or drink for three days.

¹⁰There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias, to whom the Lord called in a vision, "Ananias!" He answered, "Here I am, Lord!" ¹¹Then the Lord said to him, Go at once to Straight Street and ask, at the house of Judas, for a man of Tarsus named Saul. You will find him praying, ¹²for he has just seen in a vision that a man named Ananias has come in and placed his hands upon him, to restore his sight."

¹³Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many sources about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem, ¹⁴and now he is here with authority from the High Priest to arrest all who call upon

your name." ¹⁵But the Lord said to him, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to bring my name to the pagan nations and their kings, and the people of Israel as well. ¹⁶I myself will show him how much he will have to suffer for my name."

¹⁷So Ananias left and went to the house. He laid his hands upon Saul and said, "Saul, my brother, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me to you so that you may receive your sight and be filled with Holy Spirit." ¹⁸Immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he could see; he got up and was baptized. ¹⁹Then he took food and was strengthened.

• For several days Saul stayed with the disciples at Damascus, ²⁰and he soon began to proclaim in the synagogues that Jesus was the Son of God. ²¹All who heard were astonished and said, "Is this not the one who cast out in Jerusalem all

Jer 1:10

Tb 11:13

Gal 1:23

Rom
10:12;
1Cor 1:2

cism; his self-assurance as a believer is disguised pride. Paul sees himself as a sinner, violent and rebellious; but at the same time, he understands that God has welcomed him, chosen him and forgiven him: *this man is my chosen instrument* (v. 15).

Paul is no longer the Pharisee of the parable; rather he has put himself in the place of the publican. "My God, have mercy on me, a sinner!" This is the characteristic conversion of a militant Christian. However active we may be, we will be unable to present ourselves as witnesses to Christ, if we do not admit to being forgiven sinners. This is why there is such Christian concern for universal reconciliation.

From then on, Saul (who will take the name Paul) will be a chosen instrument of Christ to spread the Church to other countries. Until then the Church, which was led by and made up of Jews, did not go beyond the Jewish people. Paul was a Jew too, but had been educated outside his country. He enjoyed the culture of the Greeks as much as that of his own race. Because of that and because of his exceptional personality, he was to be the apostle to the Greeks.

The Church must constantly renew itself,

and is renewed through the conversion of adults. Christian communities, even when they want to be open to people who do not participate in community affairs (for example, workers, or at times, young people), are usually unable to be really open. Thus the Lord calls some people from different walks of life who, once they have received the faith of the Church, will be able to evangelize those of their own milieu and to preserve their freedom with regard to traditional groups.

In crucial times in history, Christ called new men and women whom his Church needed: Francis of Assisi and, closer to us, John XXIII.

The Way: this is what Christianity was called; the word expressed the fact that it is not only a matter of religious teachings, but rather a new way of life enlightened by hope.

• 19. For three years Paul preaches his faith and relates his own experience in the province of Damascus, also called Arabia (see Gal 1:17 and 2 Cor 11:32).

Paul is already going his own way. He does not separate from the Church, as his journey to Jerusalem shows, since he goes there to meet the apostles. Yet he preserves his inde-

those calling upon this Name? Did he not come here to bring them bound before the chief priests?"

18:28 ²²But Saul grew more and more powerful, and he confounded the Jews living in Damascus when he proved that Jesus was the Messiah.

22:23; Gal 1:21 ²³After a fairly long time, the Jews conspired together to kill him. ²⁴But Saul became aware of their plan: Day and night they kept watch at the city gate in order to kill him. ²⁵So his disciples took him one night and let him down from the top of the wall, lowering him in a basket.

²⁶When Saul came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples there, but they were afraid of him because they could not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He recounted to them how Saul had seen the Lord on his way and the words the Lord had spoken to him. He told them also how Saul had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

²⁸Then Saul began to live with them. He moved about freely in Jerusalem and preached openly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹He also spoke to the Hellenists and argued with them, but they wanted to kill him. ³⁰When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

³¹Meanwhile, the Church had peace. It was building up throughout

all Judea and Galilee and Samaria with eyes turned to the Lord and filled with comfort from the Holy Spirit.

Peter visits the churches

• ³²As Peter traveled around, he went to visit the saints who lived in Lydda. ³³There he found a man named Aeneas who was paralyzed, and had been bedridden for eight years. ³⁴Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed!" And the man got up at once. ³⁵All the people living in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

³⁶There was a disciple in Joppa named Tabitha, which means Dorcas or Gazelle. She was always doing good works and helping the poor. ³⁷At that time she fell sick and died. After having washed her body, they laid her in the upstairs room.

³⁸As Lydda is near Joppa, the disciples, on hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, "Please come to us without delay."

³⁹So Peter went with them. On his arrival they took him upstairs to the room. All the widows crowded around him in tears, showing him the clothes that Dorcas had made while she was with them. ⁴⁰Peter made them all leave the room and then he knelt down and prayed. Turning to the dead body he said, "Tabitha,

pendence as he waits for the promptings of the Spirit.

• 32. Peter appears in his role of "inspector" of the churches (the word bishop means inspector).

It is said here that he *visits the saints*. In the years prior to Christ, the word "saints," namely, those consecrated to God, was used especially to designate the new people of God since the coming of the Messiah (see Dn 7:27). Christians are the new people of God since they are the Church (see 5:11); they are also the saints.

The raising of Tabitha is similar to what Jesus did. It is an echo of the Resurrection of Christ, as the raising of Lazarus (Jn 11) or the widow's son had been (Lk 7:11).

God wished to grant these signs to strengthen faith in Jesus' resurrection. Besides the people who had been witnesses of his Resurrection, it was necessary that, in various places, the communities could see for themselves that God "raises the dead" (see Heb 11:19). Similar resurrections have been seen in the Church even in recent years.

3:6;
Mk 2:11

Lk 8:41

Mk 5:41 stand up.” She opened her eyes, looked at Peter and sat up. ⁴¹Peter gave her his hand and helped her up. Then he called in the saints and widows and presented her to them alive. ⁴²This became known throughout all of Joppa and many people believed in the Lord because of it. ⁴³As for Peter, he remained for some time in Joppa at the house of Simon, a tanner of leather.

The baptism of Cornelius

8:40;
23:33

16:14;
13:16;
Lk 7:4

10 ¹There was in Caesarea a man named Cornelius, captain of what was called the Italian Battalion. ²He was a religious and God-fearing man together with his whole household. He gave generously to the people and constantly prayed to God.

Sir 35:6

³One afternoon at about three he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming towards him and calling him, “Cornelius!” ⁴He stared at the vision with awe and said, “What is it, sir?” And the angel answered, “Your prayers and your alms have just been recalled before God. ⁵Now send some men to Joppa and summon a certain Simon also

known as Peter; ⁶he is the guest of Simon, a tanner, who lives beside the sea.”

11:5

⁷As soon as the angel who spoke to him departed, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those attached to his service, ⁸and after having explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

⁹The next day, while they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up to the roof at about noon to pray. ¹⁰He became hungry and wished to eat, but while they were preparing food, he fell into a trance. ¹¹The heavens were opened to him and he saw an object that looked like a large sheet coming down, until it rested on the ground by its four corners. ¹²In it were all kinds of four-legged animals of the earth, reptiles and birds.

¹³Then a voice said to him, “Get up, Peter, kill and eat!” ¹⁴But Peter replied, “Certainly not, Lord! I have never eaten any defiled or unclean creature.” ¹⁵And again a second time the voice spoke, “What God has made clean, you must not call unclean.” ¹⁶This happened three times

Lev 11;
Ezk 4:14

Gen 1:31

• **10.1** This is a new intervention of the Holy Spirit so that the Church would go beyond the Jewish world and the Gospel would reach other people. Cornelius (like the Ethiopian of 8:27) is a *God-fearing man*, that is to say, a foreigner who believes in the one God of the Jews, without being a member of the Jewish community.

The heavens were opened to him (v. 11). He may have seen a tent coming down—an image of God’s dwelling place in the world—which contained creatures considered unclean.

The Jewish religion included a whole series of prohibitions for believers. It distinguished between *clean* animals, namely those that could be eaten, and *unclean* ones that could not. The same regulations applied to people; Jews could not mix with non-Jews. Thus Peter’s vision, in which he is invited to eat un-

clean animals, means that he must not hesitate to go and stay in the house of Cornelius the Roman.

We do not know if Peter would have hesitated to baptize a non-Jew (and uncircumcised) as Cornelius was. The manifestation of the Holy Spirit forced his hand.

At last someone of another race is baptized! In many places today as well, the Church is in danger of being reduced to a closed social group, and, perhaps, of becoming antiquated. Popes and bishops invite us to go forward and to dialogue with all people. Yet it would seem that only the intervention of an angel could convince us to go to other people.

He sent his people (v. 36). Peter presents Jesus. Jesus’ life was that of an authentic prophet, who comes to continue the work of previous prophets, spokespersons of God’s word. But, in Jesus, God was offering *the good news*

and then the sheet was taken up again into the sky.

¹⁷While Peter was still puzzling over the meaning of the vision he had seen, the messengers of Cornelius arrived at the gate asking for the house of Simon. ¹⁸They called out to inquire whether Simon, also known as Peter, was staying there. ¹⁹At that moment, as Peter continued pondering on the vision, the Spirit spoke to him, "There are men looking for you; ²⁰get up and go downstairs and follow them without hesitation, for I have sent them."

²¹So Peter went and said to the men, "I am the one you are looking for. What brings you here?" They answered, ²²"He who sent us is Captain Cornelius. He is an upright and God-fearing man, well respected by all the Jewish people. He has been instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, so that he may listen to what you have to say." ²³So Peter invited them in and put them up for the night.

The next day he went off with them and some of the believers from Joppa accompanied him. ²⁴The following day, he arrived in Caesarea where Cornelius was expecting them; he had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵As Peter was about to enter, Cornelius went to him, fell on his knees and bowed low.

²⁶But Peter lifted him up saying, "Stand up, for I too am a human being."

²⁷After talking with him, Peter entered and found many people as-

sembled there. ²⁸Then he said to them, "You know that it is forbidden for Jews to associate with anyone of another nation or to enter their houses. But God has made it clear to me that no one should call any person common or unclean; ²⁹because of this I came at once when I was sent for. Now I should like to know why you sent for me."

³⁰Cornelius then answered, "Just three days ago at this time, about three in the afternoon, I was praying in my house when a man in shining clothes stood before me ³¹and said to me: 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer, and your alms have been remembered before him. ³²Send someone, therefore, to Joppa and ask for Simon, also known as Peter, who is guest at the house of Simon the tanner by the sea.' ³³So I sent for you at once and you have been kind enough to come. Now we are all here in God's presence, waiting to hear all that the Lord has commanded you to say."

³⁴Peter then spoke to them, "Truly, I realize that God does not show partiality, ³⁵but in all nations he listens to everyone who fears God and does good. ³⁶And this is the message he has sent to the children of Israel, the good news of peace he has proclaimed through Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of all. ³⁷No doubt you have heard of the event that occurred throughout the whole country of the Jews, beginning from Galilee, after the baptism John preached. ³⁸You know how God

Gal 2:12

Lk 24:4

Dt 10:17

Rom 2:11;
Eph 6:9;
1P 1:1713:26;
Is 52:7;
Rom 10:15

13:24;

of peace, that is, God was reconciling human-kind with himself, once and for all. We are easily reminded of one of Paul's central points: see Romans 5:1-11; 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 and Ephesians 2:14-16.

Judge of the living and the dead (v. 42). This expression comes from religious concepts of the time, making a distinction between the

judgment of those who would witness Christ's return at the end of the world (the living) and those who had died before (the dead). See the same in 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

One receives forgiveness through his Name. Through his Name, that is to say, through his own power and effectiveness. This confirms Jesus' divine authority.

Lk 4:14; Is 61:1
 anointed Jesus the Nazarean with Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all who were under the devil's power, because God was with him; ³⁹we are witnesses of all that he did throughout the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem itself. Yet they put him to death by hanging him on a wooden cross.

5:30
⁴⁰But God raised him to life on the third day and let him manifest himself, ⁴¹not to all the people, but to the witnesses that were chosen beforehand by God—to us who ate and drank with him after his resurrection from death. ⁴²And he commanded us to preach to the people and to bear witness that he is the one appointed by God to judge the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets say of him, that everyone who believes in him has forgiveness of sins through his Name.”

13:39;
 15:9;
 Lk 24:47

8:16;
 19:5;
 Rom 5:5;
 8:36

⁴⁴Peter was still speaking when the Holy Spirit came upon all who listened to the Word. ⁴⁵And the believers of Jewish origin who had come with Peter were amazed, “Why! God gives and pours the Holy Spirit on foreigners also!” ⁴⁶For indeed this happened: they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

⁴⁷Then Peter declared, “Can we refuse to baptize with water these people who have received the Holy Spirit, just as we have?” ⁴⁸So he had them baptized in the name of Jesus

Christ. After that they asked him to remain with them for some days.

Peter justifies his conduct

11 ¹News came to the apostles and the brothers and sisters in Judea that even foreigners had received the Word of God. ²So, when Peter went up to Jerusalem, these Jewish believers began to argue with him, ³“You went to the home of uncircumcised people and ate with them!”

8:14;
 15:7

Gal 2:12

⁴So Peter began to give them the facts as they had happened, ⁵“I was at prayer in the city of Joppa when, in a trance, I saw a vision. Something like a large sheet came down from the sky and drew near to me, landing on the ground by its four corners. ⁶As I stared at it, I saw four-legged creatures of the earth, wild beasts and reptiles, and birds of the sky. ⁷Then I heard a voice saying to me: ‘Get up, Peter, kill and eat!’ ⁸I replied, ‘Certainly not, Lord! No common or unclean creature has ever entered my mouth.’ ⁹A second time the voice from the heavens spoke, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call unclean.’ ¹⁰This happened three times, and then it was all drawn up into the sky. ¹¹At that moment three men, who had been sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were staying. ¹²The Spirit instructed me to go with them without hesitation; so these six brothers

• **11.1** That Peter went to baptize a non-Jew seems to us the most normal thing. Let us not forget that the Christians of Jerusalem remained Jews, with their education, their prejudices and their sensibility. They did not see how a person could be part of Jesus' family without first belonging to the people of God who, for them, identified itself with the Jewish nation. Could someone become their brother without first being circumcised? The warning they gave Peter is the first witness of the constant pressure that Christians have always

brought to bear on their priests and bishops throughout history. Everytime that someone would like to open our Church to people of another culture, a powerful group will only be willing to accept those who consent to lose their own identity and be Christians in the way we ourselves are. These believers in Jerusalem are not acting in bad faith and they accept Peter's explanations. Like him, what courage the leaders of the Church will need to respond to the calls of the Holy Spirit when faced with the prejudices of a group!

came along with me and we entered into the man's house. ¹³He told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house and telling him: 'Send someone to Joppa and fetch Simon, also known as Peter. ¹⁴He will bring you a message by which you and all your household will be saved.'

¹⁵I had begun to address them when suddenly the Holy Spirit came upon them, just as it had come upon us at the beginning. ¹⁶Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷If, then, God had given them the same gift that he had given us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to resist God?"

¹⁸When they heard this they set their minds at rest and praised God saying, "Then God has granted life-giving repentance to the pagan nations as well."

The foundation of the Church at Antioch

• ¹⁹Those who had been scattered because of the persecution over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message, but only to the Jews. ²⁰But there were some natives of Cyprus and Cyrene among them who, on

coming into Antioch, spoke also to the Greeks, giving them the good news of the Lord Jesus. ²¹The hand of the Lord was with them so that a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

²²News of this reached the ears of the Church in Jerusalem, so they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³When he arrived and saw the manifest signs of God's favor, he rejoiced and urged them all to remain firmly faithful to the Lord; ²⁴for he himself was a good man filled with Holy Spirit and faith. Thus large crowds came to know the Lord.

²⁵Then Barnabas went off to Tarsus to look for Saul ²⁶and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they had meetings with the Church and instructed many people. It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called *Christians*.

• ²⁷At that time some prophets went down from Jerusalem to Antioch ²⁸and one of them, named Agabus, inspired by the Holy Spirit, foretold that a great famine would spread over the whole world. This actually happened in the days of the Emperor Claudius. ²⁹So the disciples decided, within their means, to set something

• 19. Antioch, 500 kilometers north of Jerusalem, was the principal town of the Roman province of Syria, a pagan country, where Greek was spoken but where there was an important Jewish community. Luke does not tell us who presented the Christian faith to the pagans for the first time, nor how that happened. The Christians of Jewish origin that did it would deserve a statue, or better still a feast in our liturgy. So there is at Antioch for the first time a community where Jews and non-Jews are assembled: the future of the Church was there. The Jerusalem community is the Rome of the primitive Church. It is conscious of its authority and immediately asks to examine more closely this extraordinary new hap-

pening: a Church where Jews accept to rub shoulders with the uncircumcised.

The Jerusalem community behaved as having authority over the new churches; the case of Antioch would touch everyone since, for the Palestinian Jews, accepting pagans was something of a scandal. Did not the Law of Moses forbid living with "uncircumcised" people?

• 27. There is mention of prophets. Among the gifts that the Holy Spirit granted to converts, the gift of "prophecy" was one of the most outstanding. On various occasions the "prophet" would receive from God an insight into future events of the community, or something concerning one of its members.

Lk 1:66

4:36

9:27

21:10

Gal 2:10;
Rom
15:26;
2Cor 8:91:5;
Jn 14:2614:27;
17:30;
26:20

aside and to send relief to the brothers and sisters who were living in Judea. ³⁰They did this and sent their donations to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

James is put to death; Peter's miraculous escape

12 ¹About that time King Herod decided to persecute some members of the Church. ²He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword, ³and when he saw how it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.

This happened during the festival of the Unleavened Bread. ⁴Herod had him seized and thrown into prison with four squads, each of four soldiers, to guard him. He wanted to bring him to trial before the people after the Passover feast, ⁵but while Peter was kept in prison, the whole Church prayed earnestly for him.

⁶On the very night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound by a double chain, while guards kept watch at the gate of the prison.

⁷Suddenly an angel of the Lord stood there and a light shone in the prison cell. The angel tapped Peter on the side and woke him saying, "Get up quickly!" At once the chains fell from Peter's wrists. The angel said, "Put on your belt and your sandals." Peter did so, ⁸and the angel

added, "Now, put on your cloak and follow me."

⁹Peter followed him out; yet he did not realize that what was happening with the angel was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰They passed the first guard and then the second and they came to the iron door leading out to the city, which opened of itself for them. They went out and made their way down a narrow alley, when suddenly the angel left him.

¹¹Then Peter recovered his senses and said, "Now I know that the Lord has sent his angel and has rescued me from Herod's clutches and from all that the Jews had in store for me."

¹²Peter then found his bearings and came to the house of Mary, the mother of John also known as Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. ¹³When he knocked at the outside door, a maid named Rhoda came to answer it. ¹⁴On recognizing the voice of Peter she was so overcome with joy that, instead of opening the door, she ran in to announce that Peter was at the door. ¹⁵They said to her, "You are crazy!" And as she insisted, they said, "It must be his angel."

¹⁶Meanwhile, Peter continued knocking and, when they finally opened the door, they were amazed to see him. ¹⁷He motioned to them with his hand to be quiet and told

They would also give homilies "in the Spirit." Everyone would recognize the hand of God in the conviction and wisdom with which they spoke, discovering a word relevant to the present in a biblical passage.

The first gesture of fraternal assistance among Christians of different countries is underlined. In this paragraph the *elders* or "presbyters" (it is the same word) are mentioned. The leaders of the Christian community were so called, following the Jewish custom.

- **12.1** This second persecution reaches

the entire Christian community of Jerusalem (see 8:1). James (the greater) was one of the *pillars of the church* together with Peter and John (Gal 2:9).

Peter's second release (see the first in 5:19) brings out the powerful intercession of the Church on behalf of its leader, and also the will of Christ to keep his church beyond reach of the power of evil (see Mt 16:18).

Report this to James (v. 17). This James is the "brother of the Lord": he was already accepted as responsible for the church in Jerusalem.

them how the Lord had brought him out of prison. And he said to them, "Report this to James and to the brothers." Then he left and went to another place.

¹⁸At daybreak there was a great commotion among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. ¹⁹Herod began a search for him and, not finding him, had the guards questioned and executed. After that, he came down from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there.

Herod's death

²⁰At that time Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. By general agreement they appeared before him and, after having won over Blastus, the king's treasurer, they asked for peace, for their country was supplied with food from the territory of Herod. ²¹On the appointed day Herod, clothed in royal robes, sat on his throne and addressed them. ²²So the assembled crowd shouted back, "A god is speaking, not a man!"

²³The angel of the Lord immediately struck Herod for he did not re-

turn the honor to God, and he died eaten by worms.

²⁴Meanwhile the word of God was increasing and spreading. ²⁵Barnabas and Saul carried out their mission and then came back from Jerusalem, taking with them John also called Mark.

Paul sent by the Church

13 ¹There were at Antioch—in the Church which was there—prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Symeon known as Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod, and Saul. ²On one occasion while they were celebrating the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said to them, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul to do the work for which I have called them." ³So, after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Paul's first mission

⁴These then, sent by the Holy Spirit, went down to the port of Seleucia and from there sailed to Cyprus. ⁵Upon their arrival in Sala-

19:20
11:29

11:20

12:12;
12:25

16:27;
27:42

14:15;
2Mac
9:12

2K 19:35;
2Mac 9:5

• **13.1** This is the beginning of Paul's missions; for the time being he is sent as Barnabas' assistant.

It is very difficult to know how the Church organized itself in the beginning. It did not have the same kind of hierarchy with three orders that we have now: bishops, presbyters (or priests) and deacons: this started only at the end of the first century. The Churches of Jerusalem and Antioch were certainly not directed as those in small towns. Most of the time, the communities chose their elders among the most trusted men. They had to be recognized or installed either by the apostles or some other superior authority and accepted by the neighboring communities. Their ministry as leaders included baptism, the celebration of the Eucharist and the anointing of the sick. This institution of the Elders (see 14:23 and 11:30) copied exactly the organization of the Jewish communities.

However, wherever there were *prophets* accepted as such (this was the case in Antioch), they enjoyed greater authority, somewhat like the apostles (1 Cor 12:28 and Eph 2:20).

Paul and Barnabas are not considered apostles yet, but they are prophets. As for the *teachers*: they are those who have the ability to teach doctrine and morality based on Scripture, for the service of the community.

Luke gives the details of the beginning of this mission. It emerges from the initiative of the Holy Spirit, but responds to the life of fervor of the community of Antioch. Note also that the community agrees to have two of its five leaders leave, and that Saul and Barnabas are ready to face the risks of this adventure.

The *laying on of hands* invokes the grace of God upon these two missionaries.

• 4. This first mission begins in a very traditional way. Jews could travel throughout the

mis they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogue; John was with them as an assistant.

8:9 ⁶They traveled over the whole island as far as Paphos where they met a certain magician named Bar-Jesus, a Jewish false prophet ⁷who lived with the governor Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. He had summoned Barnabas and Saul and wanted to hear the word of God. ⁸But they were opposed by the Elymas (that is, the magician) who tried to turn the governor from the faith.

⁹Then Saul, also known as Paul,

full of Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰and said, “You son of the devil, full of all kinds of deceit and enemy of all that is right! Will you never stop perverting the straight paths of the Lord? ¹¹Now the Lord’s hand is upon you; you will become blind and for a time you will not see the light of day.” At once a misty darkness came upon him, and he groped about for someone to lead him by the hand.

¹²The governor saw what had happened; he believed, and was deeply impressed by the teaching about the Lord.

Hos
14:10

Dt 28:29

Roman empire: in any important city they would find other Jews involved in trade and always gathered in communities, in “synagogues.” From Antioch, Barnabas and Saul travel by sea to the island of Cyprus, Barnabas’ homeland.

The meeting with Sergius Paulus has the value of a sign: the Gospel not only convinces simple people, but also authorities. Paul is aware that he must witness before “kings and rulers” (Lk 21:12). The prophetic gifts of Saul are seen when he meets Sergius Paulus. From then on, the Book of Acts will no longer speak of Saul but of Paul: had the governor authorized him to use his family name? For Paul, who was already a Roman citizen (16:37), it is a further step in becoming integrated into the world of the non-Jews.

Paul and his companions. Once the mission began, Paul becomes the obvious leader. They do not stay in Cyprus; they leave there groups of believers who have been hastily instructed.

When they arrive on the continent, at the inhospitable area of Perga, John Mark leaves them. Paul’s daring plans may have scared him. They go through the mountain range of modern Turkey and reach the heart of the province of Pisidia—Antioch (which must not be confused with the other Antioch).

Luke gives all the details of the events at Antioch in Pisidia, because they were typical of the situations Paul was going to face in various parts of the Roman empire.

Paul speaks at the Sabbath gathering in the “synagogue” (house of prayer of the Jews). The worship involves psalms and biblical readings (obviously, from the Old Testament). Then, one or several of the leaders make com-

ments. Since Paul is a visitor, out of deference, they ask him to speak.

Paul’s discourse, this return to the history of Israel may seem to us to hold little interest, as was the case for Peter’s (chap. 2) and Stephen’s (chap. 7). But it was the Jewish way of preaching, and for all these emigrants, there was nothing more interesting than being reminded of this history that they knew by heart and which gave them their identity in the midst of other peoples. So Paul presents this history, highlighting a series of facts that gives it meaning and clearly leads to Christ. Paul shows that God’s promises to Israel have been fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ.

We have here a way of understanding the Gospel that we must not lose. We hold that the Jewish and later the Christian faith is “historical.” That means first of all that God has been revealed through history: our faith is not a doctrine developed by thinkers, nor has it sprung from legends. It also means that the resurrection of Jesus marks a new departure for all human history and that year-by-year history presses on towards an end where the sole issue will be Judgment and the Kingdom of God. We cannot simply preach a doctrine that is always true, we must show how the Gospel is a living power and how the Spirit of God is at work in events.

The audience reacts in various ways. Those who are listening are not all Jews; there are also those “who fear the Lord,” or “proselytes” whom we have already met in the Ethiopian (8:30) and Cornelius: these are considered second-class believers by the Jews.

From the first words, Paul greets them the same way he greets the Jews. Then, in his preaching, he does not emphasize the obser-

Paul in the capital of Pisidia

15:38 ¹³From Paphos, Paul and his companions set sail and came to Perga in Pamphylia. There John left them and returned to Jerusalem ¹⁴while they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. On the Sabbath day they entered the synagogue and sat down. ¹⁵After the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the officials of the synagogue sent this message to them, “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the assembly, please speak up.”

Lk 24:44 ¹⁶So Paul arose, motioned to them for silence and began, “Fellow Israelites and also all you who fear God, listen. ¹⁷The God of our people Israel chose our ancestors, and after he had made them increase during their stay in Egypt, he led them out by powerful deeds. ¹⁸For forty years he fed them in the desert, ¹⁹and after he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. ²⁰All this took four hundred and fifty years. ²¹After that, he gave them Judges until Samuel the prophet. Then they asked for a king and God gave them Saul, son of Kish, of the tribe of Ben-

jamin, and he was king for forty years. ²²After that time, God removed him and raised up David as king, to whom he bore witness saying: *I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, who will do all I want him to do.*

²³It is from the descendants of David that God has now raised up the promised savior of Israel, Jesus. ²⁴Before he appeared, John proclaimed a baptism of repentance for all the people of Israel. ²⁵As John was ending his life’s work, he said: ‘I am not what you think I am, for after me another one is coming whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.’

²⁶Brothers, children and descendants of Abraham, and you also who fear God, it is to you that this message of salvation has been sent. ²⁷It is a fact that the inhabitants of Jerusalem and their leaders did not recognize Jesus. Yet in condemning him, they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath but not understood. ²⁸Even though they found no charge against him that deserved death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. ²⁹And after they had carried out all that had

Ps
89:20;
1S 13:14

Mal 3:1

Lk 3:15;
Jn 1:19

3:13

vance of the Law, which only the Jews could fulfill and which made them feel superior to others; instead, Paul declares that the Law is surpassed (v. 38). He stresses the promises of God addressed to all people. Those who “fear God” are delighted by a Gospel that makes them God’s children, just as the Jews are.

They all invite Paul to speak on the same theme the following Saturday. At that time Paul makes an important decision: Instead of restricting himself to the Jews during the week, he prefers to go to those who “fear God,” people whom he wins over because he is not racist in any way. These people, in turn, bring others to the gathering on the following Sabbath—pagans who had never been involved with the Jews but now mix with them.

Then a crisis occurs. The assembly divides into two factions. Those Jews who are most

close-minded and proud are afraid when they see themselves surrounded by “unclean” pagans; they oppose Paul and even try to throw him out. Rich and pious women intervene. From that moment, a Christian community separate from the Jews is formed.

Is not all this factual? If we do not often have such crises in our own Church, it is perhaps because the apostles are few, as in Paul’s time and we have not yet had the visit of the one who will be heard beyond our walls.

All those destined for everlasting life (48). This expression does not condemn those who have not believed. It simply states that the coming to faith was a gift for those believers: God entered their life and made them bearers of a current of divine life that would transform the world (Jn 17:3).

been written concerning him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb.

³⁰But God raised him from the dead, ³¹and for many days thereafter he showed himself to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They have now become his witnesses before the people. ³²We ourselves announce to you this Good News: All that God promised our ancestors, ³³he has fulfilled for us, their descendants, by raising Jesus, according to what is written in the second psalm: *You are my Son, today I have begotten you.* ³⁴On raising him from the dead so that he would never know the decay of death, God fulfilled his promise: *I will give you the holy blessings, the sure ones, that I kept for David.*

³⁵Moreover, in another place it is said: *You will not allow your holy one to suffer corruption.* ³⁶Now David was subjected to corruption, for he died and was laid beside his ancestors after having served God's purpose in his own time. ³⁷But the one God raised up—Jesus—did not know corruption. ³⁸⁻³⁹Through him, fellow Israelites, you have forgiveness of sins, and this is our good news. Whoever believes in him is freed of everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.

⁴⁰Now watch out lest what was said by the prophet happen to you:

⁴¹*Take care, you cynics; be amazed and disappear! For I am about to do something in your days which you would never believe even if you had been told.*"

⁴²As Paul and Barnabas withdrew, they were invited to speak again on the same subject the following Sab-

bath. ⁴³After that, when the assembly broke up, many Jews and devout God-fearing people followed them and to these they spoke, urging them to hold fast to the grace of God.

⁴⁴The following Sabbath almost the entire city gathered to listen to Paul, who spoke a fairly long time about the Lord. ⁴⁵But the presence of such a crowd made the Jews jealous. So they began to oppose with insults whatever Paul said.

⁴⁶Then Paul and Barnabas spoke out firmly, saying, "It was necessary that God's word be first proclaimed to you, but since you now reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we turn to non-Jewish people. ⁴⁷For thus we were commanded by the Lord: *I have set you as a light to the pagan nations, so that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.*"

⁴⁸Those who were not Jews rejoiced when they heard this and praised the message of the Lord, and all those destined for everlasting life believed in it. ⁴⁹Thus the Word spread throughout the whole region.

⁵⁰Some of the Jews, however, incited God-fearing women of the upper class and the leading men of the city, as well, and stirred up an intense persecution against Paul and Barnabas. Finally they had them expelled from their region. ⁵¹The apostles shook the dust from their feet in protest against this people and went to Iconium, ⁵²leaving the disciples filled with joy and Holy Spirit.

Iconium is evangelized

14 ¹In Iconium Paul and Barnabas likewise went into the Jewish synagogue and preached in

11:23;
14:22

17:5;
18:6;
28:17

Is 49:6

10:2

Lk 10:11

2:39;
Ps 2:7;
Heb 1:5;
5:5

Is 55:3

Ps 16:10

Rom 3:21

Rom 1:16

Hb 1:5

• **14.1** What happened in Antioch in Pisidia happens here as well: Paul and Barnabas speak fearlessly. This is one of the character-

istics of the genuine apostle, moved by the Holy Spirit. This self-assurance has a powerful influence on the conversion of the audi-

Mk
16:20;
1Thes
1:5

such a manner that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed. ²But the Jews who would not believe stirred up the pagan people and poisoned their minds against the brothers. ³In spite of this Paul and Barnabas spent a considerable time there. They spoke fearlessly of the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace with the miraculous signs and wonders he gave them power to do.

⁴But the people of the city were divided, some siding with the Jews and some with the apostles. ⁵A move was made by pagans and Jews, together with their leaders, to harm the apostles and to stone them. ⁶But Paul and Barnabas learned of this and fled to the Lycaonian towns of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding countryside, ⁷where they continued preaching the Good News.

Lystra and Derbe

• Paul and Barnabas spent a fairly long time at Lystra. ⁸There was a

crippled man in Lystra who had never been able to stand or walk. ⁹One day, as he was listening to the preaching, Paul looked intently at him and saw that he had the faith to be saved. ¹⁰So he spoke to him in a loud voice, “In the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I command you to stand up on your feet!” And the man stood up and began to walk around.

¹¹When the people saw what Paul had done, they cried out in the language of Lycaonia, “The gods have come to us in human likeness!” ¹²They named Barnabas Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes, since he was the chief speaker. ¹³Even the priest of the Temple of Zeus, which stood outside the town, brought oxen and garlands to the gate; together with the people, he wanted to offer sacrifice to them.

¹⁴When Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their garments to show their indignation and rushed into the crowd, shouting, ¹⁵“Friends, why are you doing this? We are human be-

Mt 26:65

1Thes
1:9;
20:11

ence, but it is not a natural human gift. Paul will indicate that God gives it to preachers who place their trust in God, especially when they feel the weakest and the least prepared (see 1 Thes 2:2 and 2 Cor 12:10).

• 7. Once beyond the town of Iconium, where many citizens spoke Greek, there was nothing to help the missionaries, including the problem of language. There was also the weight of the traditional religion. It would seem to us at times that it should be easier to teach the faith in a place where everyone had a religion, and therefore a certain faith in God. This is not so. Having religion meant submitting to the totalitarian authority of customs and social traditions linked to this religion. People were enclosed in a system of interested relationships with their divinities where it was impossible even to imagine the reaction of a free person in relation to God. The non-believers in our modern societies have in fact been freed of many prejudices and confusions.

Paul saw that he had the faith to be saved.
This man must have been still far from faith

that recognized Jesus, Christ and Son of God, but it was the same faith of many of those Jesus healed in the Gospel. God does not call only theologians, even if they are needed in the Church; the others, the “little ones” should feel that they also are the very substance of the Church.

The crowd is astonished by the miracle, but it is clear they have not understood. They want to return thanks, as they always did, since God once more showed his mercy: Paul did not come for that. All happens as at Iconium and Antioch: the presence of Jews in every city of the Empire, the close communications between their communities made them formidable enemies for those who had the central authorities of Jerusalem against them. The Jews were to persecute the Christian communities and indispose the Roman authorities against them up to the Jewish War of 66-70 that brought about the ruin of their nation.

The difficulties of Lystra in fact helped Paul to define his objectives: he will no longer risk going to the provinces where it is difficult for him to speak and to be understood, and where

11:23;
13:43;
1Thes
3:3

13:2

Gal 5:3;
Gen 17:9

ings with the same weakness you have and we are now telling you to turn away from these useless things to the living God who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and all that is in them. ¹⁶In past generations he allowed each nation to go its own way, ¹⁷though he never stopped making himself known; for he is continually doing good, giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, providing you with food and filling your hearts with gladness.”

¹⁸Even these words could hardly keep the crowd from offering sacrifice to them.

¹⁹Then some Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium and turned the people against them. They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the town, leaving him for dead. ²⁰But when his disciples gathered around him, he stood up and returned to the town. And the next day he left for Derbe with Barnabas.

Return to Antioch

• ²¹After proclaiming the gospel in that town and making many disci-

ples, they returned to Lystra and Iconium and on to Antioch. ²²They were strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain firm in the faith, for they said, “We must go through many trials to enter the Kingdom of God.” ²³In each church they appointed elders and, after praying and fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had placed their faith.

²⁴Then they traveled through Pisidia, and came to Pamphylia. ²⁵They preached the Word in Perga and went down to Attalia. ²⁶From there they sailed back to Antioch, where they had first been commended to God’s grace for the task they had now completed.

²⁷On their arrival they gathered the Church together and told them all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the non-Jews. ²⁸They spent a fairly long time there with the disciples.

The council at Jerusalem

15 • ¹Some persons who had come from Judea to Antioch

he himself does not feel at home. From now on, he will evangelize the cities situated at the great crossroads, as well as the ports, and will leave to others the care of spreading the Gospel in the inner regions.

• 21. Derbe marks the end of the mission. Paul and Barnabas go back the same way they had come. They visit all the communities established on the continent. Then they will sail for Antioch without returning to the island of Cyprus.

In those days the Church did not have parishes, clergy, institutions, or books. The apostle had to organize the Church in such a way that it might continue. There was a book, the Jewish bible, namely, the Old Testament. The prophets inspired by God would draw new teachings from this book, by discovering a sign of Christ in the past. From time to time apostles or prophets coming from other churches would visit the community.

There will be gatherings around the celebration of the Lord’s Supper (see 1 Cor 11); besides the Eucharist, everyone will share with others their own spiritual gifts (see 1 Cor 12–14). Just as the Jewish communities had leaders called “elders” or presbyters, Christians also lay their hands on leaders, “presbyters,” who will lead and preside over the Eucharist (see commentary on 13:1).

So we understand that a mission does not reach its goal if it does not succeed in forming adult communities, with their own leaders and with the active participation of their members.

• 15.1 Here we see the first major discussion in the Church. Paul gives us an account of it in Galatians 2:1-10.

For two or three centuries, Jews who had emigrated to Greek-speaking countries had attracted countless pagans to their faith. However, these pagans practically had to form an

17:27

Jer 5:24

7:38;
2Cor
11:25

were teaching the brothers in this way, "Unless you are circumcised according to the law of Moses, you cannot be saved."

Gal 2:1 ²Because of this there was trouble, and Paul and Barnabas had fierce arguments with them. For Paul told the people to remain as they were when they became believers. Finally those who had come from Jerusalem suggested that Paul and Barnabas and some others go up to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the apostles and elders.

³They were sent on their way by the Church. As they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria they reported how the non-Jews had turned to God, and there was great joy among all the brothers and sisters.

14:27 ⁴On their arrival in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the Church, the apostles and the elders, to whom they told all that God had done through them. 11:2 ⁵Some believers, however, who belonged to the party of the Pharisees, stood up and said that non-Jewish men must be cir-

cumcised and instructed to keep the law of Moses. ⁶So the apostles and elders met together to consider this matter.

⁷As the discussions became heated, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that from the beginning God chose me among you so that non-Jews could hear the Good News from me and believe. ⁸God, who can read hearts, put himself on their side by giving the Holy Spirit to them just as he did to us. ⁹He made no distinction between us and them and cleansed their hearts through faith. ¹⁰So why do you want to put God to the test? Why do you lay on the disciples a burden that neither our ancestors nor we ourselves were able to carry? ¹¹We believe, indeed, that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they are."

¹²The whole assembly kept silent as they listened to Paul and Barnabas tell of all the miraculous signs and wonders that God had done through them among the non-Jews.

10-11;
Gal 2:9

11:18

Gal 2:16;
Mt 11:29

Gal 3:
10-12;
1:16

integral part of the Jewish people. Proselytes and foreign-born sympathizers were required to start following what we read in verses 19-20. Then, they had to be circumcised.

This was the way many Christians in Jerusalem saw their entry into the Church. The Pharisees among them were categorical (5): pagans are saved by faith in Christ but this faith is linked to the observance of the Law. Even though they were not fully aware of it, to them faith meant becoming an integral part of the people of God, a people who was identified with Israel.

Paul's missions contributed a new element. Communities that were mostly made of non-Jews emerged in Greek lands and Paul did not impose any condition for their baptism. For them, the people of God was the Christian community.

Was the Church going to split? Was Paul going to start another "Christian" Church, one more radical in its understanding of salvation only through faith in Christ? The Jerusalem

encounter was an effort of the whole Church to clarify its faith and to preserve its unity.

The way to resolve the conflict emphasizes the aspect of the Church as a community. The *Elders*, in charge of the Mother Church of Jerusalem, met with the *apostles* who were the supreme authority (22)... Simon Peter reminded them of his experience with Cornelius (chap. 10) and he opened the way to total freedom with regard to the Jewish religion.

We, with the Holy Spirit have decided (v. 28): the decision of the community in union with its apostles is the guarantee of the Holy Spirit. Several times in the course of history, similar debates have taken place although they were not about freeing the Gospel from the laws of the Old Testament but rather, they were dealing with Church laws and customs that had become an *impossible burden to carry* (v. 10) for most men and women. However, it is only possible to point out these obstacles at a wide open debate as the one in Jerusalem had been.

12:17;
21:18

• ¹³ After they had finished, James spoke up, “Listen to me, brothers.

Zec 2:15;
1P 2:10;
Eph 4:14

¹⁴ Symeon has just explained how God first showed his care by taking a people for himself from non-Jewish nations. ¹⁵ And the words of the prophets agree with this, for Scripture says,

Am 9:
11:12

¹⁶ *After this I will return and rebuild the booth of David which has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins and set it up again.* ¹⁷ *Then the rest of humanity will look for the Lord, and all the nations will be consecrated to my Name. So says the Lord, who does today* ¹⁸ *what he decided from the beginning.*

• ¹⁹ Because of this, I think that we should not make difficulties for those non-Jews who are turning to God.

Lev
17:10;
18:6;

²⁰ Let us just tell them not to eat food that is unclean from having been of-

fered to idols; to keep themselves from prohibited marriages; and not to eat the flesh of animals that have been strangled, or any blood. ²¹ For from the earliest times Moses has been taught in every place, and every Sabbath his laws are recalled.”

1Cor
8—10;
Rev
2:20;
Gen 9:3

The council's letters

• ²² Then the apostles and elders together with the whole Church decided to choose representatives from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. These were Judas, known as Barsabbas, and Silas, both leading men among the brothers. ²³ They took with them the following letter:

1Thes
1:1;
1P 5:12

“Greetings from the apostles and elders, your brothers, to the believers of non-Jewish birth in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. ²⁴ We have heard that some persons from among us

• 13. We have a hard time following the interventions and arguments. This is because we do not know the atmosphere in which the discussion took place. At the time, people were celebrating one of the major Jewish feasts. The Gospels call it the feast of the Dedication of the Temple (Jn 10:22) to recall both its construction by Solomon and its purification by Judas Maccabeus. The entire discussion must have started with the liturgical texts for those days. An in-depth study shows us that, in addition to the quotations of 16-18, what Peter and James said was also referring to these texts. From God, people expected a purified temple and a renewed *people* and the apostles understood that if many Jews drifted away by not believing in Christ, converted pagans were going to replace them (v. 16). Then, this *purified* people was to be like the temple, or more precisely, the *tent* (v. 16) that protected the Ark of God before human pride built the great stone temple.

James, the very conservative leader of the Jerusalem Church, interpreted the texts and he did not hesitate to admit that they confirmed what had been started with the evangelization that took place in Antioch and with Paul's missions. It would be necessary to go even further and to call people from all the nations (v. 17).

• 19. Today we are convinced that verses 20-21, repeated in 28-29 in our text, are the result of an error. These verses are unlikely and they contradict everything we read further on, either in Acts or the letters of Paul and James. What has been copied here was a later decision—as we read in Acts 20:25—made by James for communities that were mostly Jewish in terms of their members and language. Instead of that, Luke's text most likely contained one of the two following formulas: Let each one of you love his neighbor as himself or Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you. Absolutely nothing was imposed.

• 22. The final decision of the “Council” of Jerusalem, as it is presented *here*, is doubtless the best the *apostles and the Holy Spirit* could do at the time. Let us frankly say that the settlement could only be provisional and lacked doctrinal justification. To impose Jewish laws was to penalize non-Jews; it was also a way of saying that the Church was unable to live according to the “newness” of the Gospel, free of the past, free of religious discipline. In fact, a few years later, there was no question of these laws since the Church had freed itself of the Jewish community, just as it had been rejected by the Jews.

have worried you with their discussions and troubled your peace of mind. They were not appointed by us. ²⁵But now, it has seemed right to us in an assembly, to choose representatives and to send them to you, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶who have dedicated their lives to the service of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷We send you then Judas and Silas who themselves will give you these instructions by word of mouth.

20:24;
21:13

- ²⁸We, with the Holy Spirit, have decided not to put any other burden on you except what is necessary: ²⁹You are to abstain from blood from the meat of strangled animals and from prohibited marriages. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

³⁰After saying good-bye, the messengers went to Antioch, where they assembled the community and handed them the letter. ³¹When they read the news, all were delighted with the encouragement it gave them. ³²Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, spoke at length to encourage and strengthen them. ³³After they had spent some time there, the messengers were sent

off in peace by the believers; ³⁴Silas, however, preferred to stay with them and only Judas went off. ³⁵So Paul and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching with many others the word of God.

Paul’s second mission

- ³⁶After some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the believers in every town where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, to see how they are getting on.” ³⁷Barnabas wanted to take with them John also called Mark, ³⁸but Paul did not think it right to take him since he had not stayed with them to the end of their mission, but had turned back and left them in Pamphylia. ³⁹Such a sharp disagreement resulted that the two finally separated. Barnabas took Mark along with him and sailed for Cyprus. ⁴⁰Paul, for his part, chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers and sisters to the grace of the Lord.

12:12

14:26

⁴¹He traveled throughout Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches there.

Paul recruits Timothy

16 • ¹Paul traveled on to Derbe and then to Lystra. A disciple

Phil 2:19;
1Cor
4:17;
1Thes 3

- 28. The decision of the community united to its apostles guarantees the presence of the Holy Spirit. On several occasions in history, similar debates have taken place, but then it was not a question of freeing the Gospel of the Old Testament laws; it was the laws and customs of the Church that had become the *impossible burden to carry* (v. 10) for a large human majority. Only when a debate is wide open, as was the one at Jerusalem, does it succeed in pointing out the obstacles and ecclesiastical taboos. As long as the central organisms stifle the liberty of expression, the mission weakens and encloses itself within a traditional clientele decreasing day by day.

- 36. This is the year 50. It has been thirteen years since Paul encountered Christ on

the road to Damascus and now another stage of his life is starting. He acts as the leader in charge. The apostles and the Church in Jerusalem officially recognized the mission that Christ had given him on the day of his conversion.

The sudden breakup between Paul and his friend Barnabas should not surprise us: faith does not destroy one’s personality. Time and thanksgiving tend to lessen conflicts. Some years later Paul, who is imprisoned, will be helped by Mark (Phil 24), and much later, imprisoned again, Paul will ask Mark to come and help him (2 Tim 4:11).

- **16.1** For Paul it is not enough to have established Elders in every community; he also wants to have assistants who are to visit and strengthen the existing communities and form

named Timothy lived there, whose mother was a believer of Jewish origin but whose father was a Greek.

2Tim
3:11

²As the believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him, Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him. ³So he took him and, because of the Jews of that place who all knew that his father was a Greek, he circumcised him.

1Cor
9:20

⁴As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, for the people to obey. ⁵Meanwhile, the churches grew stronger in faith and increased in number every day.

Gal 4:13

⁶They traveled through Phrygia and Galatia, because they had been prevented by the Holy Spirit from preaching the message in the province of Asia. ⁷When they came to Mysia, they tried to go on to Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to do this. ⁸So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas.

20:5

Paul goes to Macedonia

•⁹There one night Paul had a vision. A Macedonian stood before him and begged him, “Come over to

Macedonia and help us!” ¹⁰When he awoke, he told us of this vision and we understood that the Lord was calling us to give the Good News to the Macedonian people.

¹¹So we put out to sea from Troas and sailed straight across to Samothrace Island, and the next day to Neapolis. ¹²From there we went inland to Philippi, the leading city of the district of Macedonia, and a Roman colony. We spent some days in that city.

¹³On the sabbath we went outside the city gate to the bank of the river where we thought the Jews would gather to pray. We sat down and began speaking to the women who were gathering there. ¹⁴One of them was a God-fearing woman named Lydia from Thyatira City, a dealer in purple cloth.

As she listened, the Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying. ¹⁵After she had been baptized together with her household, she invited us to her house, “If you think I am faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us to accept her invitation.

10:2;
16:32

new ones, as Paul himself does. Timothy becomes the first of these. The apostle takes into account the good testimony that believers give of Timothy. When it is a matter of looking for leaders for the Church, Paul will always demand that they have a good reputation (see 1 Tim 3:7 and Titus 1:6).

A detail shows us how Paul was able to give in. He does not want pagans to be circumcised: this ritual has no value for a Christian. Yet, since Timothy is Jewish, Paul circumcises him according to the Jewish rite, so that he will not have any problems with believers of Jewish origin, and so that they will be better able to minister among them.

Luke gives but a few details of a journey that probably lasted two years. Paul's letters give us an idea of the unremitting work he undertook to form believers and their leaders: a mission is more than gathering people together and preaching to them; it has to arouse and con-

vert those who will give life to the community—a life of its own and which will continue to develop.

On two occasions the Holy Spirit prevents Paul from carrying out his plan to develop the Church in the Roman province of Asia. The Spirit shows him he must go beyond, to Macedonia that was the first province of Europe. Thus God's will that the Gospel be taken as soon as possible to Rome, the center of the empire, is carried out. Paul, who is so dynamic and enterprising, follows the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

• 9. Suddenly the text mentions *we*, that is to say, that Luke is beginning to relate his own involvement. We must conclude that in Troas, Paul and Silas met Luke, a doctor from Antioch who was waiting for them. He may have arrived by boat while the two missionaries were traveling inland.

Paul and Silas in prison

• ¹⁶One day, as we were on our way to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and gained much profit for her owners by her fortune-telling.

¹⁷She followed Paul and the rest of us shouting, “These people are servants of the Most High God. They will make known to you a way of salvation.” ¹⁸The girl did this for several days until Paul was annoyed. Then he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you, come out of her!” The spirit went out of her that very moment.

¹⁹When her owners realized that all the profits they expected had gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the local authorities. ²⁰And when they had turned them over to the officials, they said, ²¹“These people are Jews and they are disturbing our city. They have come here to introduce customs which are not lawful for us Romans to adopt or practice.”

²²So they set the crowd against them and the officials tore the

clothes off Paul and Silas and ordered them to be flogged. ²³And after inflicting many blows on them, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to guard them safely. ²⁴Upon receiving these instructions, he threw them into the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

A miraculous deliverance

²⁵About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. ²⁶Suddenly a severe earthquake shook the place, rocking the prison to its foundations. Immediately all the doors flew open and the chains of all the prisoners fell off.

²⁷The jailer woke up to see the prison gates wide open. Thinking that the prisoners had escaped, he drew his sword to kill himself, ²⁸but Paul shouted to him, “Do not harm yourself! We are all still here.”

²⁹The jailer asked for a light, then rushed in, and fell at the feet of Paul and Silas. ³⁰After he had secured the other prisoners, he led them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹They answered, “Believe

Eph
5:19;
Col 3:16

4:31

4:12

3:6

2Cor
11:25;
Phil 1:30;
1Thes
2:2

• 16. From the beginning, the Gospel proves its freeing power even if this time the result is the imprisonment of the apostles. Paul frees a female fortune-teller. This gift is condemned in the Old Testament (the Bible seems to recognize that it is not necessarily a question of fraud). This fortune-telling appears to be linked to dark powers that deny the absolute over-ruling power of God regarding the destiny of his children (Col 2:15; 1 Cor 2:8): wanting to know the future is in fact always to doubt God. The master of this girl put forward an argument that was meant to impress the authorities in a society where customs were sacred—the same argument the Jews used and will use against Paul (and later many “Christian” societies will use it against true believers): *these people introduce customs which are not lawful for us Romans to adopt and practice.*

In Roman jails there was a main room and

in the center of the pavement a grill closed the opening through which the most dangerous prisoners were thrown into an underground cell. They throw Paul and Silas there. They are perfectly free in spite of their chains. Though they have been beaten and are wounded, they feel like praising God. In the silence of the night, the jailers and the other prisoners listen to them.

God is also listening. How many similar episodes, wherever a witness of Christian freedom has been at the risk of one’s life and liberty!

We who take the time, and rightly so to prepare for baptism, might be surprised by this very swift baptism of a whole family. It could be said that it was a special case: let us stress also that all this happened in a very different world from our own.

Note also that Paul knows how to defend his rights (v. 37).

in the Lord Jesus Christ and you and your household will be saved.”
³²Then they spoke the word of God to him and to all his household.

³³Even at that hour of the night, the jailer took care of them and washed their wounds; and he and his whole household were baptized at once. ³⁴He led them to his house, spread a meal before them and joyfully celebrated with his whole household his newfound faith in God.

³⁵The next morning the officials sent police officers with the order, “Let those men go.” ³⁶So the jailer said to Paul and Silas, “The officials have sent an order for you and Silas to be released. You may leave and go in peace.”

22:25;
23:27

³⁷But Paul said to him, “They flogged us publicly, and jailed us without trial, men who are Roman citizens; and now they want to smuggle us out secretly? Oh no! Let them come themselves and lead us out.”

³⁸The police officers reported this to the officials, who were afraid when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. ³⁹So they came and apologized to them, took them out and asked them to leave the town.

⁴⁰Once outside the prison, Paul and Silas went to Lydia’s house where they met and encouraged the brothers and sisters, and then departed.

Difficulties in Thessalonica

¹Thes
2:2

17 ¹Paul and Silas took the road through Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica,

• **17.1** In this mission, we should note the case of Thessalonica, capital of Macedonia. The Christian community will begin with people of Greek origin, *worshippers of God*, whom Paul met in the synagogue, and with other Greek pagans. The few Jewish converts (v. 4) will probably become the pillars and the educators of the community. They had a last-

where there was a Jewish synagogue. ²As Paul used to do, he went to the synagogue and on three Sabbaths he held discussions with them about the Scriptures. ³He explained and proved to them that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead, and he said, “Such a Messiah is this Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you.”

13:14

9:20;
18:5

⁴Some of them were convinced and joined Paul and Silas. So too did a great number of Greeks sympathetic to Judaism and many prominent women.

⁵This only made the Jews jealous, so they gathered some of the good-for-nothing street loafers and formed a mob to start a riot in the town. They came to the house of Jason, in an attempt to bring Paul and Silas before the people’s assembly. ⁶Not finding them there, they dragged off Jason and some believers to the city authorities shouting, “These people who have turned the world upside down have come here also, ⁷and Jason has given them hospitality. They all disregard the decrees of the Emperor and claim that there is another king, Jesus.”

13:45;
¹Thes
2:15;
Rom
16:21

16:20;
24:5

⁸In this way they upset the crowd and the city officials who heard them. ⁹The officials released Jason and the others on bail.

¹⁰As soon as night fell, the believers sent Paul and Silas off to Beroea. On their arrival they went to the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹Its members were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica and welcomed the

Jn 19:12

ing experience of God’s word and knew how to use the Bible. They sang the psalms, had some idea of a liturgy in the framework of a community, and had a better grasp of moral principles. Paul will always be careful not to let the Jews bring the converts back to a religion of commandments, but it was doubtless that among them he would, for a time, find the bet-

message with great enthusiasm. Each day they examined the Scriptures to see if these things were so. ¹²Many of them came to believe, as did numerous influential Greek women, and many men as well.

¹³But when the Jews of Thessalonica came to know that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they hurried there to cause a commotion and stir up the crowds. ¹⁴At once, the believers sent Paul away to the coast; but both Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea. ¹⁵Paul was taken as far as Athens by his escort, who then returned to Berea with instructions for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible.

Paul in Athens

• ¹⁶While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he felt very uneasy at the sight of a city full of idols. ¹⁷He held discussions in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing people, as well as daily debates in the public square with ordinary passersby.

¹⁸Epicureans and Stoic philosophers debated with him, some of them asking, "What is this babblers trying to say?" Others commented, "He sounds like a promoter of foreign gods," because he was heard to speak of Jesus and 'the Resurrection.' ¹⁹So they took Paul and led him off to the Areopagus hall, and said, "We would like to know what this

Col 1:22

ter prepared elements. Persecution prevents Paul from staying more than two months. How could a church formed under such conditions and consisting of pagans with little training survive? Yet it persevered: see the *Letters to the Thessalonians*.

• 16. Athens was the most famous city in the Greek world. Even after the loss of political control, Athens remained the cultural center of the Roman world. Paul goes there, as he always aims for large cities or ports, where news travels from one place to another and spreads through sea travel.

He is offered the chance of speaking before the philosophers and the authorities of Athens, and he accepts. For these intellectuals he formally states his message, but it is a flop. It might have been expected. Usually those who accept the faith are those whose life draws nearer to Christ. His audience was only interested in novelties; they were masters, and Paul had no title. Paul confronted the Christian faith with the other religions, showing that for all peoples it was time to begin a new worldwide age. A first part recalled the fact of religious plurality: it was only a first stage in God's plan. Then came the Gospel: all humanity was to unite in order to prepare for God's judgment. It was there without a doubt that Paul would have given his own witness, but they did not allow him to finish his discourse.

Different than what the Jews often did (see again Wis 11–15), Paul does not attack images

and the honor given to them. Paul knows that in all religions, many people give images their due place and do not confuse these traditional images and rites with the true and only God, for they have a certain idea of him. Paul only wants to show that this God is far beyond the figures we attribute to him, and immediately affirms the unity of humankind in the plan of God. *From one stock he created the whole human race.* Let us not resume the outmoded discussions to know if Paul condemns or not the theories of human origin from different individuals. Paul affirms that the race is one in God's plan: the first among them, the model, the elder brother is not the little prehistoric ancestor but Christ, Son of God.

He wanted them to seek God by themselves—and eventually to find him. An astonishing affirmation of a humanity to which God has not said everything and which has to advance *by groping* and making many mistakes. God has so willed it, even if dictators think to impose a truth. Here, Paul does not condemn philosophers without faith, or whose theories have many harmful aspects.

How many interesting perspectives! Are we to be satisfied in just condemning our world in crisis? Never has humanity known such an upheaval in its conditions of life, such challenges to face, such changes to accept in everyday life. It is normal for a person to be disoriented, to have to grope and make enormous errors: this is part of God's plan. Very often the Church is unable to say what is the best choice:

new teaching is that you are talking about. ²⁰Some of the things we hear you say sound strange to us, and we would like to know what they mean.”

²¹Indeed, all Athenian citizens, as well as the foreigners who live there, have as their favorite occupation talking about or listening to the latest news.

²²Then Paul stood up in the Areopagus hall and said, “Athenian citizens, I note that in every way you are very religious. ²³As I walked around looking at your shrines, I even discovered an altar with this inscription: *To an unknown God*. Now, what you worship as unknown, I intend to make known to you.

²⁴God, who made the world and all that is in it, does not dwell in sanctuaries made by human hands, being as he is Lord of heaven and earth. ²⁵Nor does his worship depend on anything made by human hands, as if he were in need. Rather it is he who gives life and breath and everything else to everyone. ²⁶From one stock he created the whole human race to live throughout all the earth, and he fixed the time and the boundaries of each nation. ²⁷He wanted them to seek him by themselves, even if it were only by groping for him, succeed in finding him.

Yet he is not far from any one of

us. ²⁸For in him we live and move and have our being, as some of your poets have said: *for we too are his offspring*. ²⁹If we are indeed God’s offspring, we ought not to think of divinity as something like a statue of gold or silver or stone, a product of human art and imagination.

³⁰But now God prefers to overlook this time of ignorance and he calls on all people to change their ways. ³¹He has already set a day on which he will judge the world with justice through a man he has appointed. And, so that all may believe it, he has just given a sign by raising this man from the dead.”

³²When they heard Paul speak of a resurrection from death, some made fun of him, while others said, “We must hear you on this topic some other time.” ³³At that point Paul left. ³⁴But a few did join him, and believed. Among them were Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus court, a woman named Damaris, and some others.

Paul in Corinth

18 • ¹After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ²There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, following a decree of the Em-

Is 40:18

10:42;
1Thes
1:10

1Cor
1:23;
15:12

14:17;
Gal 4:8

Ps
104:30

14:17;
Gen 10;
Dt 32:8

18:18;
1Cor
16:9

are not Christians the Church? And they are divided. God has not the habit of supplying prophets who would think and know for others. We can only reaffirm what is our faith: everything should end with judgment and the judgment will be made before Christ. Peoples are saved and condemned according to whether they accept or not this God who became one of us.

Later, however, Paul points out that God prefers to overlook that time. Christ has come: starting with him, who is the head (Col 1:18), the dispersed children of God are going to be gathered in one body (Jn 11:52; Eph 1:10), and since he is the definitive truth, all

must believe in the Gospel. God judges the world through Christ, that is to say, that people are saved or condemned depending on whether they accept or reject this God who appeared humble.

• **18.1** Corinth, the main port of Greece and capital of the province of Achaia with 600,000 inhabitants, of whom 400,000 are slaves, is a religious, commercial and cultural center. It has countless temples with thousands of prostitutes serving in them. The city is famous for its luxury and its corruption. Paul goes there and remains eighteen months—until the end of the year 52. This date is exact:

peror Claudius which ordered all Jews to leave Rome. ³Paul went to visit them and then stayed and worked with them because they shared the same trade of tentmaking. ⁴Every Sabbath he held discussions in the synagogue, trying to convince both Jews and Greeks.

⁵When Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was able to give himself wholly to preaching and proving to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. ⁶One day when they opposed him and insulted him, he shook the dust from his clothes in protest, saying, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. I am not to blame if from now on I go to the non-Jews.”

⁷So Paul left there and went to the house of a God-fearing man named Titus Justus who lived next door to the synagogue. ⁸A leading man of the synagogue, Crispus, along with his whole household, believed in the

Lord. On hearing Paul, many more Corinthians believed and were baptized.

⁹One night, in a vision, the Lord said to Paul, “Do not be afraid, but continue speaking and do not be silent, ¹⁰for many people in this city are mine. I am with you, so no one will harm you.” ¹¹So Paul stayed a year and a half in that place, teaching the word of God among them.

¹²When Gallio was governor of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the court. And they accused him, ¹³“This man tries to persuade us to worship God in ways that are against the Law.”

¹⁴Paul was about to speak in his own defense when Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of a misdeed or vicious crime, I would have to consider your complaint. ¹⁵But since this is a quarrel about teachings and divine names that are

1Cor
4:12;
9:6;
2Cor
11:7;
Gal 6:6;
1Thes
2:9

13:46;
28:28;
13:51;
Lk 9:5

15:14;
Jn 10:16;
Jer 1:8;
Is 41:10;
1Cor 2:3

19:38

23:29;
Jn 18:31

history tells us that Gallio was governor of Achaia during the year 52.

Aquila and his wife, Priscilla, had just arrived in Corinth. They were perhaps already Christians, but Jewish Christians were not different from others before the decree of the emperor.

Aquila and Priscilla simply place themselves at Paul's service to help him. They will assist him on other occasions with the natural availability of people who do not feel tied to any city or country.

A vision: there are not many in this book. Perhaps Paul was wondering whether it would not be better for him to retire for a time as he had already done and as Jesus had advised in case of persecution (Mt 10:23). The devil increases the opposition when someone sets foot on his field: in this center of corruption, grace would triumph.

The Jews brought him before the court. Here we have a new example of the problems Paul met in the great Roman centers. Different peoples co-exist and many conflicts are settled within communities according to their proper laws and customs. Gallio, the Roman governor, has no wish to be dragged into the jungle

of traditions and disputes, especially with the Jews who enjoyed religious privileges within the Roman Empire.

The Jews are furious in seeing the success of Paul that relies on the Word of God, that is, on their own sacred books. They fear that the boldness of the Christians might stir a reaction from the pagans, in which case they, too, would be the victims.

They seized Sosthenes—and beat him. A sure bet would be that this Sosthenes, a Jew, is the one mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:1. Even if he already acted as a prominent member of the Christian group, it is doubtful whether the Jews would have attacked him before the authorities: most probably it was a group of bystanders falling on a well-known Jew.

Paul had made a vow (v. 18). He shaved his head as it was said in Numbers 6:5. All that Paul had written to turn converted pagans away from the Jewish Law did not prevent him, a Jew, from feeling at ease with the traditional forms of Jewish piety. He knew that faith alone saves, but it was his wish to mark with a vow some secret agreement he had made with the Lord.

proper to your own law, see to it yourselves: I refuse to judge such matters.”¹⁶ And he sent them out of the court.

1Cor 1:1 ¹⁷Then the people seized Sosthenes, a leading man of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal; but Gallio paid no attention to it.

Num 6:9; Rom 16:1 ¹⁸Paul stayed on with the disciples in Corinth for many days; he then left them and sailed off with Priscilla and Aquila for Syria. And as he was no longer under a vow he had taken, he shaved his head before sailing from Cenchreae.

13:14 ¹⁹When they reached Ephesus, he left Priscilla and Aquila behind and entered the synagogue to hold discussions with the Jews. ²⁰But although they asked him to stay longer, he declined. ²¹And he took leave of them saying, “God willing, I will come back to you again.” Then he set sail from Ephesus. ²²On landing at Caesarea, he went up to greet the Church, and then went down to Antioch.

16:5 • ²³After spending some time there, he left and traveled from place

to place through Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening the disciples.

• ²⁴A certain Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, arrived at Ephesus. He was an eloquent speaker and an authority on the Scriptures, ²⁵and he had some knowledge of the *way* of the Lord. With great enthusiasm he preached and taught correctly about Jesus, although he knew only of John’s baptism. ²⁶As he began to speak boldly in the synagogue, Priscilla and Aquila heard him; so they took him home with them and explained to him the *way* more accurately. ²⁷As Apollos wished to go to Achaia, the believers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly strengthened those who, by God’s grace, had become believers, ²⁸for he vigorously refuted the Jews, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah.

1Cor 1:12; 16:12; 2Cor 3:1; Col 4:10

9:20; 17:3

Paul in Ephesus

19 • ¹While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior of the country and came

• 23. In this short paragraph Luke combines the end of the second journey and the beginning of the third.

Paul does not stay in Ephesus, the capital of the province of Asia. He is in a hurry to return, after two and a half years of mission. He goes up to Jerusalem and returns to Antioch, which is the first and the main among the churches in the pagan world. Paul goes there to rest after every journey. The life of this large community, with years of experience, and the contact with its apostles, helped him to see what the future of the Church would be.

When he leaves again, Paul visits the churches established on his second mission. This takes him several months, so he will only arrive at Ephesus in 54. Meanwhile a church had been established there.

• 24. During Paul’s absence, Aquila, Priscilla and others resumed the first contacts that

he had established in the Jewish community. An important success: the integration of Apollos who will be one of the most valued missionaries (1 Cor 3:6; 4:6; 15:12). Apollos, we are told, knew something of *The Way* (v. 26). We have already met this term which denoted Christianity: not only a religion, nor only a faith or morale, but all that together and more. Apollos, like the twelve men mentioned in 19:1-7, had probably been in Palestine when Jesus was already known there. His teaching had not yet given rise to a movement nor made a stir equal to that resulting from John the Baptist’s preaching, which was followed by baptisms and commitments.

• 19.1 For three years, Paul wanted to evangelize Ephesus. Ephesus was one of the most beautiful and largest cities in the empire.

Luke wanted to relate the baptism of these twelve disciples of John the Baptist. As we

8:17; 10:44
 to Ephesus. There he found some disciples ²whom he asked, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They answered, "We have not even heard that anyone may receive the Holy Spirit."
 Jn 7:39 ³Paul then asked, "What kind of baptism have you received?" And they answered, "The baptism of John."

13:24; Lk 3:3
⁴Paul then explained, "John's baptism was for conversion, but he himself said they should believe in the one who was to come, and that one is Jesus."
 8:17; 10:46 ⁵Upon hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶Then Paul laid his hands on them and the Holy Spirit came down upon them; and they began to speak in tongues and to prophesy. ⁷There were about twelve of them in all.

⁸Paul went into the synagogue and for three months he preached and discussed there boldly, trying to convince them about the Kingdom of God. ⁹Some of them, instead of believing, grew obstinate and criticized the *way* publicly. So Paul departed from them and took the disciples with him. He taught daily in the lecture hall of a certain Tyrannus. ¹⁰He did this for two years, so that all those who lived in the province of Asia, both Jews and non-Jews, heard the word of the Lord.

• ¹¹God did extraordinary deeds of power through the hands of Paul. ¹²Even handkerchiefs or cloths that had touched his skin were laid upon the sick and their illnesses were cured, and evil spirits also departed from them.

5:15;
 Lk 8:44

have just said they knew something of Jesus' teaching, but as for being his disciples, they lacked what was most important: they had not received the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit came down upon them (v. 6). See Acts 8:14-17. We must not forget that in the beginning, the Christian language was limited. We know that the Holy Spirit is much more than the manifestations that follow the laying on of hands. So we have such statements as: *we have not heard that there is the Holy Spirit*, while other texts state: *that the Holy Spirit be received*. The laying on of hands is meant to confirm the change worked at baptism through the experience of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:7). Many Christians would be surprised today if they have never had this tangible experience of God. Let us not say that these gifts are no longer useful or that such things do not happen today. What is important, surely, is to believe and live one's faith rather than to feel it. Such an experience, however, is often the shock that gives rise to a re-blossoming of our faith: it shows us that God is near, and he is master of our inner self. Perhaps our rationalist temperament and our Church life, mistrustful of all that is a personal expression, serves as a dampener of the gifts of the Spirit; perhaps it is rather the poverty of our commitment to Jesus.

They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Are we to presume that in the be-

ginning baptism was *in the name of Jesus* and not in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? It is not certain.

In the name of signifies: by the power of; maybe the baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit was called *the baptism in the name of Jesus* to distinguish it from the baptism of John and the baptisms of other religions. It is also possible that at the moment of receiving the water in the name of the Holy Trinity, the person baptized had to make a personal invocation in the Name of Jesus. Possibly also in early times, baptism was given "in the Name of Jesus" and later the Church modified the formula in order to distinguish itself from groups that believed in Jesus but without recognizing him as Son of God, born of the Father. There would be nothing to astonish us in such a change: the Church of the apostles had given the first formula; the same Church gave the second formula attributed to Jesus in Matthew 28:19.

• 11. Many are the signs that Jesus promised for those who would believe (Mk 16:15-18). Similar things happen today when the Church becomes missionary again.

We are impressed by the cures. Perhaps the in-depth conversion of those who confess their magic practices and burn their precious books is more important. Apparently they did not do

Lk 9:49;
Mt 12:27

¹³Some Jews who traveled around driving out evil spirits, also tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus over those possessed by evil spirits, saying, "I command you by this Jesus whom Paul preaches."

¹⁴Among them were the seven sons of a Jewish priest named Sceva.

¹⁵But one day, when they entered a house and dared to do this, the evil spirit said to them, "Jesus I recognize and Paul I know; but who are you?"

¹⁶Then the man with the evil spirit sprang at them and overpowered first one and then another. And he handled them so violently that they fled from that house naked and mauled. ¹⁷This became known to all the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus; all of them were very impressed and the name of the Lord Jesus came to be held in great honor.

¹⁸Many of those who had become believers came forward and openly acknowledged their former practices. ¹⁹Many who had practiced magic arts collected their books and burned them in front of everyone. When the value of these was assessed, it came to fifty thousand silver coins.

6:7;
12:24

²⁰In this way, the word of the Lord spread widely and with power.

The silversmiths' riot

2Cor
1:15

• ²¹When all these events were completed Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, decided to travel through Macedonia and Achaia again and then

go on to Jerusalem. And he said, "After I have been there, I must visit Rome also." ²² So he sent two of his assistants, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia ahead of him, while he himself stayed on for a time in Asia.

²³About that time the city was deeply troubled because of the *way*.

²⁴It all began because of a certain silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver models of the temple of the goddess Artemis and whose business brought a great deal of profit to the workers. ²⁵He called them, together with others who did similar work, and said, "Friends, you know that our prosperity depends on this work. ²⁶But, as you can see and hear for yourselves, this Paul has led astray a great number of people, not only here in Ephesus, but also throughout most of the province of Asia. And he has convinced them that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. ²⁷The danger grows that not only our trade will be discredited, but even that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will count for nothing. She whom Asia and all the world worships may soon be stripped of her renown."

²⁸On hearing this they became enraged and began shouting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" ²⁹The uproar spread throughout the whole city. The mob rushed to the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, two Macedonians who were Paul's traveling companions. ³⁰Paul

9:2

it at the time of their baptism but later, when they were more convinced of their faith.

• 21. The success of the Gospel was so great that it staggered idolatry. It appeared, however, alongside many other religions. The Roman world was full of religious restlessness, and from Asia in particular came many doctrines, cults and teachings that claimed to free people from death. The Gospel was different

from all of them since, while those doctrines were merely theories, the apostles were proclaiming a fact: a Jew named Jesus has risen and we have seen him risen.

There is a chaotic disturbance. The group of idol-makers defend their interests. The Jews who lived quietly among the pagan population are worried, lest they be confused with the Christians, so they try to excuse themselves.

wished to face this crowd, but the disciples would not let him. ³¹Some of the officials of the Asian province also, who were friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to show himself in the theater.

³²Meanwhile the whole assembly was in an uproar. Some shouted one thing, and some shouted another and most of them did not know why they were there. ³³Some of the crowd wanted a certain Alexander to speak, whom the Jews put forward. Alexander intended to make a speech of defense before the crowd, ³⁴but when they recognized that he was a Jew, they chanted all together for about two hours, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

³⁵Finally the town clerk was able to calm the mob. He said, "Citizens of Ephesus, who does not know that Ephesus is keeper of the temple of the great Artemis, and of her image which fell from the sky? ³⁶Since these things are undeniable, you must calm yourselves and do nothing rash. ³⁷These men whom you brought here are not temple-robbers nor have they spoken ill of our goddess. ³⁸If Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen want to bring charges against anyone, the courts are open and there are officials. Let them bring charges against each other. ³⁹If there is anything further that needs to be investigated, let it be done in the lawful assembly. ⁴⁰For as it is today, we

are in danger of being charged with rioting, since there is no valid excuse we can give for this wild demonstration." ⁴¹And the town clerk dismissed the assembly.

Paul returns to Macedonia

20 ¹After the uproar died down, Paul called his disciples together to encourage them. Then he said goodbye and set out on his journey to Macedonia. ²He traveled throughout those regions and spent himself in speaking and encouraging them. He finally arrived in Greece.

³When he had been there for three months, he wanted to set sail for Syria, but as the Jews were plotting against him, he decided to return by way of Macedonia. ⁴When he was about to leave for the Asian province, some companions went with him, Sopater, son of Pyrrhus, from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy, Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia. ⁵So they went ahead and waited for us in Troas, ⁶while we set sail from Philippi as soon as the festival of Unleavened Bread was over. Five days later we joined them in Troas where we spent a week.

The Eucharist at Troas

⁷On the first day of the week we were together for the breaking of the bread, and Paul, who intended to leave the following day, spoke at

16:40

16:20;
18:172Cor
2:122:42;
1Cor
11:17;
16:2

• **20.1** Paul remained two and a half years in Ephesus, and some details in his letters let us see that Luke's account is very incomplete. The greater part of Paul's activity is not mentioned, in particular the evangelization of the neighboring towns of Ephesus by a team of his assistants: see the Introduction to Ephesians. Paul had much to suffer, and was perhaps imprisoned (Introduction to the Philippians). It was at this time that he wrote his letter to the Galatians and the First Letter to the Corinthians.

Paul goes to Macedonia (where Thessalonica is located) and to Greece (where he spends some time in Corinth). There in Corinth, as he perseveres with his plan to go to Rome, he writes to the Romans.

• **7.** Luke tells us that the Eucharist took place on *the day after the Sabbath*—already our Sunday: the Christians had separated from the Jews, replacing the Sabbath with the following day, the first day of the week, the day

length. The discourse went on until midnight, ⁸with many lamps burning in the upstairs room where we were gathered. A young man named Eutychius was sitting on the window ledge, ⁹and as Paul kept on talking, Eutychius grew more and more sleepy, until he finally went sound asleep and fell from the third floor to the ground. There they found him dead.

9:36; 1K 17:21; Mk 5:35 ¹⁰Paul went down, bent over him and took him in his arms. “Do not be alarmed,” he said, “there is life in him.” ¹¹Then he went back upstairs, broke the bread and ate. After that he kept on talking with them for a long time until daybreak and then he left. ¹²As for the young man, they lifted him up alive and were greatly comforted.

¹³We went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos, where we were to pick up Paul. This was the ar-

rangement since Paul intended to travel by foot. ¹⁴In fact, we met him at Assos and taking him aboard, we went on to Mitylene. ¹⁵We sailed from there and arrived off Chios the next day. A day later we came to Samos and the following day we reached Miletus.

¹⁶Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so as not to lose time in Asia, for he was eager to reach Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost, if at all possible.

Paul’s farewell to the Ephesian elders

• ¹⁷From Miletus Paul sent word to Ephesus, summoning the elders of the Church. ¹⁸When they came to him, he addressed them, “You know how I lived among you from the first day I set foot in the province of Asia, ¹⁹how I served the Lord in humility through the sorrows and trials that

14:23

19:10;
1Thes
1:52Cor 1:8;
1Thes
2:10

of Jesus’ resurrection. Doing so they were putting on their calendar the major event of their faith.

Naturally they meet in a home and this is the beginning of the Christian gathering. They share instruction and reflection, concluding with thanksgiving (or Eucharist) and communion with the body of the Lord.

Each one could speak, and Paul as prophet and apostle had a good deal to say, prepared or inspired. What might have been Paul’s long discourse? He read and interpreted texts from the Scripture that were referring to Jesus; he gave witness of his own commitment to Christ; he related the many happenings in his mission when the Spirit of Christ was at work.

This part of the celebration could be prolonged: the prophets, even Paul, tend at times to overdo it, but they could not separate without ending with “the breaking of bread”, the Eucharist.

With the unlucky fall of one of the youth and the intervention of Paul, the participants witness God’s power over death (see 10:36).

• 17. Paul returns to Palestine. He had a presentiment or he knew by a revelation of the Holy Spirit that another phase of his life was

about to begin: the years of prison and trials. So he wished to say goodbye to all the leaders of the Church in the Roman province of Asia. He did not know all of them well, since the evangelization of this province had been the work of his team of assistants (20:4). These leaders are called *elders* in verse 17 and *inspectors* (or “episcopos,” from which we have bishops) in verse 28. See on this subject the commentary on Philippians 1:1.

Paul gives his own example and develops the obligations of “pastors” in the Church (v. 28). He then invites them not to enclose themselves in the role of president or administrator of the community: they must prepare it for difficult times. Let them compare themselves with Paul and ponder on the sacrifices that the apostolic task demands of him. Is it good for them to rely on another—an apostle of course—when they are confronted with difficulties?

In verses 28-30, we have the warning of divisions and heresies in the Church: the same message will reappear in the Pastoral Letters (2 Tim 3:1-9). We are used to seeing Christians divided. For Paul, it was unthinkable. When he speaks of “the Churches of Christ” (Rom 16:4 and 16; 1 Cor 4:17; 11:16), he is

the Jews caused me. ²⁰You know that I never held back from doing anything that could be useful for you; I spoke publicly and in your homes ²¹and I urged Jews and non-Jews alike to turn to God and believe in our Lord Jesus.

commend you to God and to his grace-filled word, which is able to make you grow and gain the inheritance that you shall share with all the saints.

³³I have not looked for anyone's silver, gold or clothing. ³⁴You yourselves know that these hands of mine have provided for both my needs and the needs of those who were with me. ³⁵In every way I have shown you that by working hard one must help the weak, remembering the words that the Lord Jesus himself said, 'Happiness lies more in giving than in receiving.'

³⁶After this discourse, Paul knelt down with them and prayed. ³⁷Then they all began to weep and threw their arms around him and kissed him. ³⁸They were deeply distressed because he had said that they would never see him again. And they went with him even to the ship.

On to Jerusalem

21 ¹When we had finally taken leave of them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. ²There we found a ship that made for Phoenicia; we went aboard and set sail. ³We caught sight of Cyprus but passed it by on our left, as we continued on towards Syria. We landed at Tyre, where the ship had to unload cargo. ⁴There we found the disciples and stayed a week. Warned by the Spirit, they told Paul not to go to Jerusalem.

21:11

Phil 1:23;
3:12

2Tim 4:7

1P 2:25;
5:3;
Heb
13:20;
1P 2:9Mt 7:15;
Jn 10:122Tim 4:2;
Gal 4:17

²²But now I am going to Jerusalem, chained by the Spirit, without knowing what will happen to me there. ²³Yet in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that imprisonment and troubles await me. ²⁴Indeed I put no value on my life, if only I can finish my race and complete the service to which I have been assigned by the Lord Jesus, to announce the good news of God's grace.

²⁵I now feel sure that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom of God will ever see me again. ²⁶Therefore I declare to you this day that my conscience is clear with regard to all of you. ²⁷For I have spared no effort in fully declaring to you God's will.

²⁸Keep watch over yourselves and over the whole flock the Holy Spirit has placed into your care. Shepherd the Church of the Lord that he has won at the price of his own blood. ²⁹I know that after I leave, ruthless wolves will come among you and not spare the flock. ³⁰And from among you, some will arise corrupting the truth and inducing the disciples to follow them.

³¹Be on the watch, therefore, remembering that for three years, night and day, I did not cease to warn everyone even with tears. ³²Now I

only thinking of the local communities who communicate among themselves and all accept without discussion the same faith and tradition of the apostles. Paul alludes to what awaits him: all that we can do is to follow Christ, who *has acquired his Church by his own blood*. Only in heaven will a leader of the Church find rest and retirement (20:32).

In verses 33-35 Paul takes up the resignation discourse of Samuel (1 S 12:3). How quickly can a person be self-serving and look after self in any apostolic work.

The text also mentions the "bishops" (that word means inspectors). We do not know if they are the elders themselves, or only some of them, those with greater responsibility.

•⁵ But when it was time, we departed and continued on our journey. All of them, wives and children included, came out of the city with us, and on the beach we knelt down and prayed.⁶ After that we said good-bye to one another; we boarded the ship and they returned home.

⁷ We continued our journey, sailing from Tyre to Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and spent a day with them.⁸ On the following day we left and came to Caesarea. There we entered the house of Philip the evangelist and we stayed with him. He was one of the Seven⁹ and had four unmarried daughters who were gifted with prophecy.

¹⁰ We were there some days when a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own

feet and hands with it, saying,¹¹ Thus speaks the Holy Spirit: "This is how the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and hand him over to the foreign power."

¹² When we heard this, we, together with these people of Caesarea, begged Paul not to go up to Jerusalem.¹³ Then he answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."¹⁴ When he would not be persuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

¹⁵ After this we got ready and went up to Jerusalem.¹⁶ With us were some of the disciples of Caesarea who brought us to the house of a Cypriot where we were to stay. He was called Mnason and was one of the early disciples.

20:36

Lk 18:32

20:24;
Lk 21:12

11:28

• **21.5** Paul goes up to Jerusalem, and manifestations of the Spirit follow. Paul is warned that he should not go, and this happens when he himself leaves *chained by the Spirit* (20:22) that means without the possibility of making any other decision. It is the right moment to see how the Spirit of God is one with the spirit of the person he inspires: those who warn Paul know and declare that he will meet with trouble and they would not want it. Paul knows and he wants it. Today, such manifestations are not part of the ordinary experience of Christians, with the exception of certain charismatic groups. Yet on looking into the subject it would seem that many people do receive such warnings but attach little importance to them.

The Spirit passes through our spirit as does light through thick colored glass and takes its color. Many manifestations that certain people seek are current mainly in primitive religions, even the non-Christian: must we take it that they are the most desirable religious experiences? However, if the Spirit of God wills to use our parapsychological senses to let us feel his presence in this firmly closed fortress that we call "our own self" and where we pretend to be the only rulers, "Praise the Lord! Alleluia." Let him have us speak in tongues, laugh and cry, if such breaks the ice and opens the

doors of our reason that has already seemingly known everything.

A good number of Christians make fun of such happenings. They are free to believe or not: there are so many illusions and much charlatanism. All they have to do is to ask themselves whether or not they are systematically denying any divine manifestation in a world we believe we know well, through human experience. If God no longer has the right to intervene in a world given up to reason and the laws of science, how can there be a true and trustful communion with him?

That is important. Whoever renounces and gives self to God sees the Spirit becoming more and more active in her life, not through visions and marvels, but through silent inspiration. This becomes so habitual that a person cannot live without it and knows through experience that the inner inspiration is right even though reason suggests another way of acting. Such a person mistrusts her own projects and follows this spiritual instinct.

The primitive Church had its prophets, but always wanted community discernment to judge whether it was truly God's Spirit (1 Cor 14:29; 1 Thes 5:21; 1 Jn 4:1-3). The Bible already spoke of prophets who spoke without being sent, or dreamed what they wanted to dream (Jer 29:16). The account of the journey

Paul is received by the Church of Jerusalem

• ¹⁷When we arrived in Jerusalem the brothers welcomed us warmly.

¹⁸The next day Paul went with us to James house where all the elders had gathered. ¹⁹After greeting them, Paul began telling them in detail everything God had done among the non-Jews through his ministry.

²⁰After hearing this, they all praised God, but they said, “You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews of Judea have come to believe, and all of them are zealous for the Law.”

²¹Yet they have heard that you teach the Jews who live in pagan nations to depart from Moses, telling them not to have their sons circumcised and to renounce Jewish customs. ²²We shall gather the assembly for, in any case, they will hear that you have arrived.

²³Then do as we tell you.

There are four men among us who have made a vow. ²⁴Take them

and purify yourself along with them and pay the sacrifice for them to shave their heads. In that way everyone will know that there is nothing true in what they have been told about you, but that you go on keeping the Law.

²⁵As for the non-Jews who have become believers, we sent them a letter to tell them that they are only obliged not to eat meat offered to idols, or blood, or flesh of strangled animals; and also to avoid prohibited sexual union.”

²⁶So the next day Paul took the men; he purified himself with them and entered the Temple to give notice of what day the sacrifice would be offered for each of them to end his time of purification.

Paul is arrested in the Temple

• ²⁷When the seven days were almost over, some Jews from Asia, who saw Paul in the Temple, began to stir up the whole crowd. They

helps us to get an idea of how these first communities welcomed brothers and sisters from other parts at a time when communication was limited. Besides, would there have been a Eucharistic celebration with these foreigners without at least asking about themselves and their Church? It was quite different when apostles or prophets were passing by for then they were granted manifestations of the Spirit, with a more developed knowledge of the Word, as well as news of the universal Church.

• 17. The Christians of Jewish origin praise Paul when he gets to Jerusalem but, at the same time, they humiliate him. There is a rumor among them that Paul, besides not imposing the Judaic Law on Christian converts from paganism, also suggests that the Jews abandon the Law. They asked him to prove his fidelity to the past by becoming godfather to a few believers who had made a fairly costly vow—because if Paul had come from the Greeks, he would have money and could pay well!

Those who insist are the *elders* working with James “the brother of the Lord”: all are

Jews from Palestine who, in spite of their faith, are still attached to the customs of the Old Testament.

They point out the importance of the Jerusalem community: *thousands of Jews* in order to make their demands respected. They may still have been more numerous than the Christians in the pagan world: this was the inheritance of the past. Paul accepts for the sake of peace, but it will be his downfall.

• 27. There are several similarities between Paul’s arrest and Stephen’s a few years before (see 6:9). The Jews from Asia draw up several accusations: the most serious one being that Paul brought an “uncircumcised” man into the Temple; this profanation was punishable by death. *This is the man who is spreading his teaching everywhere against our people, our law and this Sanctuary.* There were similar accusations against Christ and Stephen.

This is a false accusation. Nevertheless, the Jews are not totally wrong: through his teachings, Paul forms Christians who replace the Temple worship with faith in Christ; they replace the Law with a life of obedience to the

15:3

11:2;
Gal 5:1Rom
2:15;
Gal 3:2218:18;
1Cor
9:20

15:19

20:4

seized him ²⁸ shouting, “Fellow Israelites, help! This is the man who is spreading his teaching everywhere against our people, our law and this Sanctuary. And now he has even brought non-Jews into the Temple area, defiling this Holy Place.” ²⁹For they thought they had seen him in the city with Trophimus, a Greek man from Ephesus and they supposed that Paul had introduced him into the temple.

³⁰Then turmoil spread through the whole city. People came running from all sides. They seized Paul and dragged him outside the Temple. At once the gates were shut.

³¹They would have killed him, had not a report reached the commander of the Roman troops that all of Jerusalem was rioting. ³²At once the commander took some officers and soldiers and rushed down to the crowd.

On seeing him with the soldiers, the crowd stopped beating Paul. ³³The commander went over to Paul, arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains; then he inquired who he was and what he had done. ³⁴But some in the crowd shouted one thing and others another. As the commander was unable to find out the facts because of the uproar, he ordered Paul to be brought to the fortress. ³⁵When Paul reached the steps, he actually had to be carried up by the soldiers because

of the violence of the mob, ³⁶for a multitude of people followed shouting, Kill him!

³⁷Just as he was about to be taken inside, Paul said to the commander, “May I say something to you?” He replied, “So you speak Greek! ³⁸Are you not the Egyptian, then, who caused a riot some time ago and let a band of four thousand terrorists out into the desert?” Paul answered, ³⁹“I am a Jew, a citizen of Tarsus, a well-known city in Cilicia. I beg you, let me address these people.”

The commander agreed. ⁴⁰So Paul standing on the steps, motioned to the people with his hand and, when they were silent, he began to speak to them in Hebrew.

Paul addresses the Jews

22 • ¹“Brothers and fathers, listen to what I have to say to you in my defense.” ²When they heard him speaking to them in Hebrew, they became more quiet. So he went on.

³“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up here in this city where I was educated in the school of Gamaliel, according to the strict observance of our Law. And I was dedicated to God’s service, as are all of you today. ⁴As for this *way*, I persecuted it to the point of death and arrested its followers, both men and women, throwing them into prison.

9:26

7:2

8:3;
Gal 1:14;
Phil 3:6;
Rom 10:2

Spirit and Jewish nationalism with universal Christian community.

The Roman troops occupying Jerusalem and seeking order were stationed in a fortress adjacent to the Temple and overlooking it. Thanks to this, the soldiers were able to intervene before Paul met the same fate as Stephen.

• **22.1** Paul here gives personal witness. He will stress he is still faithful to the religion of

his fathers: but he has not been able to prevent Christ, *the Lord*, from imposing himself on him. Paul will quote Gamaliel (Acts 5:34); and then a Christian Jew very faithful to the Law, Ananias (v. 12). The crowd listens. The reaction comes when Paul says that the pagans will share the privileges of the Jews. The pagans: our enemies, impure people and enemies of God! The same affirmation had been decisive in the condemnation of Jesus (Mt 21:42).

⁵The High Priest and the whole Council of elders can bear witness to this. From them I received letters for the Jewish brothers in Damascus and I set out to arrest those who were there and bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment. ⁶But as I was traveling along, nearing Damascus, at about noon a great light from the sky suddenly flashed about me. ⁷I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me: 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' ⁸I answered: 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me: 'I am Jesus the Nazarean whom you persecute.' ⁹The men who were with me saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. ¹⁰I asked: 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord replied: 'Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told all that you are destined to do.' ¹¹Yet the brightness of that light had blinded me and so I was led by the hand into Damascus by my companions.

¹²There a certain Ananias came to me. He was a devout observer of the Law and well spoken of by all the Jews who were living there. ¹³As he stood by me, he said: 'Brother Saul, recover your sight.' At that moment I could see and I looked at him. ¹⁴He then said, 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Just One and to hear the words from his mouth. ¹⁵From now on you shall be his witness before all the pagan peoples and tell them all that you have seen and heard. ¹⁶And now, why delay? Get up and be baptized and have your sins washed away by calling upon his Name.'

¹⁷On my return to Jerusalem I was praying in the Temple, when I fell into a trance ¹⁸and saw him. He spoke to me: 'Get ready to leave Jerusalem without delay, because they will not accept your testimony

about me.' ¹⁹I answered: 'Lord, they know well that I imprisoned those who believed in you and had them beaten in every synagogue, ²⁰and while the blood of your witness Stephen was being poured out, I stood by and approved it and even guarded the cloaks of his murderers.' ²¹Then he said to me: 'Go, for I am sending you far away to the pagan nations.'"

²²Up to this point the crowd listened to Paul, but on hearing the last words, they began to shout, "Kill him! He does not deserve to live!" ²³They were screaming and waving their cloaks and throwing dust into the air. ²⁴So the commander ordered Paul to be brought inside the fortress and questioned after flogging, to find out why they made such an outcry against him.

²⁵But when the soldiers had strapped him down, Paul said to the officer standing there, "Is it legal to flog a Roman citizen without a trial?"

²⁶On hearing this the officer went to the commander and said, "What are you doing? That man is a Roman citizen." ²⁷So the commander came and asked him, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" "Yes," answered Paul. ²⁸The commander then said, "It cost me a large sum of money to become a Roman citizen." Paul answered, "I am one by birth."

²⁹Then those who were about to question him backed away, and the commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put a Roman citizen in chains.

Paul appears before the Sanhedrin

³⁰The next day the commander wanted to know for certain the charges the Jews were making against Paul. So he released him from prison and called together the High Priest and the whole Council;

Jer 1:5

16:37

Gal 1:15

3:14;
7:525:21;
6:12;
Mt 10:17

and they brought Paul down and made him stand before them.

2Cor
1:12

23 ¹Paul looked directly at the Council and said, “Brothers, to this day I have lived my life with a clear conscience before God.” ²At that the High Priest Ananias ordered his attendants to strike him on the mouth. ³Then Paul said, “God is about to strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the Law, and you break the Law by ordering me to be struck!” ⁴At this the attendants protested, “How dare you insult God’s High Priest?” ⁵Paul answered, “Brothers, I did not know that he was the High Priest. For Scripture says: *You shall not curse the ruler of your people.*”

Jn
18:22;
Mt 23:27

22:27;
Lev
19:15

5:17;
26:6;
Phil 3:5

⁶Paul knew that part of the Council were Sadducees and others Pharisees; so he spoke out in the Council, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, son of a Pharisee. It is for the hope in the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial here.”

⁷At these words, an argument broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the whole assembly was divided. ⁸For the Sadducees claim that there is neither resurrection, nor angels nor spirits, while the

Mk 12:18

Pharisees acknowledge all these things.

⁹Then the shouting grew louder, and some teachers of the Law of the Pharisee party protested, “We find nothing wrong with this man. Maybe a spirit or an angel has spoken to him.”

¹⁰With this the argument became so violent that the commander feared that Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He therefore ordered the soldiers to go down and rescue him from their midst and take him back to the fortress.

¹¹That night the Lord stood by Paul and said, “Courage! As you have borne witness to me here in Jerusalem, so must you do in Rome.”

18:9;
27:24

The plot to kill Paul

¹²When it was day, certain Jews formed a conspiracy: they bound themselves by an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. ¹³There were more than forty of them who joined in this conspiracy.

9:23

¹⁴They went to the high priests and the elders and said, “We have bound ourselves by oath not to taste food until we have killed Paul. ¹⁵Now then, it is up to you and the Council together to convince the Roman commander to bring him down to

• **23.1** To understand the chapters dealing with Paul’s trial we have to remember that justice in the Roman empire was very well organized. The supreme tribunal was in Rome: this was the *Tribunal of Caesar*, and Roman citizens fearing a mistrial in their province could appeal to the Tribunal of Caesar. There were governors (or procurators) who administered justice in each province. In the Jewish territory, the Romans who occupied the country kept the important cases for themselves, but they left the rest to the Jewish tribunals, especially religious affairs. Paul was to go through various tribunals, beginning with the Sanhedrin, or religious court of the Jews, all the way to the tribunal of Caesar.

Thus, through Paul, the words of Jesus entrusting to his apostles the mission of proclaiming him before Jewish and pagan authorities was to be fulfilled.

Paul tries to make the resurrection of Christ the theme of his declaration. There was a trial to condemn Jesus. Now, Paul tries to have the governors pay attention to the cause of the risen Jesus, and he succeeds.

In every age, such will be the zeal of the witnesses of Christ when they are accused: to demonstrate that they are not acting out of self-interest, nor from any human motive, but because they are the servants of Christ.

you on the pretext that you want to investigate his case more thoroughly. We, for our part, are prepared to kill him before he gets there.”

¹⁶But the son of Paul’s sister heard about the planned ambush, so he went to the headquarters and informed Paul. ¹⁷Paul sent for one of the officers and said, “Take this young man to the commander for he has something to report to him.”

¹⁸So the officer took him and brought him to the commander, saying, “The prisoner Paul called me and asked me to bring this boy to you because he has something to tell you.”

¹⁹The commander took him by the hand and drawing him aside asked him privately, “What is it that you have to report to me?” ²⁰The boy replied, “The Jews have agreed among themselves to ask you tomorrow to have Paul brought down to the Council as if to inquire more thoroughly about him. ²¹But do not be persuaded by them, for there are more than forty of them ready to ambush him, having bound themselves by an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are now ready to do it and are awaiting your decision.” ²²The commander let the boy go with this advice, “Do not tell anyone that you gave me this information.”

Paul is transferred to Caesarea

²³Then the commander summoned two of his officers and said to them, “Get ready to leave for Caesarea by nine o’clock tonight, with two hundred infantrymen, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen. ²⁴Provide horses also for Paul to ride, so that he may be brought safely to Felix the governor.”

²⁵He then wrote the governor a letter to this effect:

²⁶“Claudius Lysias greets the Most

Excellent Governor Felix and communicates to him the following: ²⁷The Jews had arrested this man and were about to kill him when I intervened with my troops and took him out of their hands, since I knew he was a Roman citizen. ²⁸As I wanted to know what charge they had against him, I presented him before the Sanhedrin ²⁹and I discovered that the accusation related to matters of their Law, but there was nothing that deserved death or imprisonment. ³⁰When I was informed that the Jews had prepared a plot against this man, I decided to send him to you and told his accusers to present their complaints before you. Farewell.”

³¹The soldiers acted in accordance with these instructions. They took Paul and brought him to Antipatris by night. ³²On the following day, they returned to the fortress but the horsemen continued journeying with him. ³³Upon entering Caesarea they handed the letter to the governor and presented Paul to him. ³⁴When Felix had read the letter, he asked Paul from which province he was, and when he learned that Paul was from Cilicia, ³⁵he said to him: I shall hear your accusers when they come. And he ordered that he be kept in custody in the palace of Herod.

The case before Felix

24¹After five days Ananias the High Priest came down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus. And they presented their case against Paul before the governor. ²Paul was called in and Tertullus accused him in this way:

³“Most Excellent Felix, thanks to you—your labors and your wise reforms—our people now enjoy great

18:14

Lk 23:15

peace. We accept all this in every way and in every place, and we are totally grateful to you. ⁴So as not to take more of your time, I beg you to listen briefly to us with your usual kindness. ⁵We have found that this man is a pest, he creates division among the Jews throughout the world and is a leader of the Nazarene sect. ⁶He even tried to profane the Temple, so we seized him. We would have judged him according to our law, ⁷but Lysias the commandant intervened in a very violent way and took him from us. ⁸Then he declared that his accusers must present themselves before you. By examining him yourself, you will learn from him about all that we accuse him of.”

⁹The Jews confirmed this, firmly maintaining that all this was so.

¹⁰Then the governor motioned to Paul who said:

“As I know that you have administered this nation for many years, I make my defense with much confidence. ¹¹You yourself can ascertain that not more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship, ¹²and that they did not find me disputing with anyone or inciting the people, either in the Temple or in the synagogues or in the city. ¹³So they cannot prove the things of which they now accuse me.

¹⁴But this I admit before you, that I serve the God of our ancestors according to the Way that they call a sect. I believe everything written in the Law and in the Prophets, ¹⁵and I have the same hope in God that they have, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both the good and the sinners. ¹⁶So I strive always to have a clear conscience before God and before people.

¹⁷After many years, I came to bring help to those of my nation and to offer sacrifices. ¹⁸On that occa-

sion, they found me in the Temple; I had been purified according to the Law and there was no crowd or commotion. Yet all began with some Jews from Asia ¹⁹who ought to be here before you to accuse me, if they have anything against me. ²⁰Let these men say what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin, ²¹unless it was for having declared in a loud voice when I was before them: ‘Today I am being judged on account of the resurrection of the dead.’”

²²Felix who was well-informed about the Way, postponed the case and said to them, “When the commandant, Lysias, comes down, I will examine the case thoroughly.” ²³So he ordered the captain to keep Paul under guard, giving him certain liberty and without preventing his friends from attending to him.

²⁴After some days, Felix came with his wife Drusilla who was a Jew. He sent for Paul and let him speak about faith in Christ. ²⁵But when Paul spoke about justice, self-control and the future judgment, Felix was frightened and he said to him: “You may leave now; I shall send for you some other time.” ²⁶Felix was hoping that Paul would give him money, so he sent for him often and conversed with him.

²⁷Two years passed, and Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and as Felix wanted to remain on good terms with the Jews, he left Paul in prison.

The trial before Festus

25 ¹Three days after Festus arrived in the province, he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem. ²There the chief priests and the elders accused Paul again. ³In a very hypocritical way, they asked as a favor from Festus that Paul be brought

17:6;
24:14;
28:22

9:2

21:26

17:32;
Mk 6:17

23:6

12:3

to Jerusalem; but they were planning to kill him on the way. ⁴Festus answered that Paul was under custody in Caesarea and, as he himself had to go there shortly, he added, ⁵Let those of you who have the authority go down with me to Caesarea, and if this man has done anything wrong, let them accuse him.”

⁶Festus did not stay in Jerusalem for more than eight or ten days, and then he went to Caesarea. The next day, he took his seat on the tribunal and sent for Paul. ⁷When Paul arrived, the Jews who came from Jerusalem stood around him and presented many serious charges that they could not prove. ⁸Paul defended himself from all these saying, “I have not committed any offense against the Law of the Jews, or against the Temple or against Caesar.”

Lk 23:14

24:14

⁹Then Festus, who wanted to please the Jews, asked Paul: “Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem to be tried before me?” ¹⁰Paul answered, “I am on trial before Caesar’s tribunal; here I have to be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews; you yourself know this very well. ¹¹If I have committed any crime which deserves death, I accept death. But if I have not done anything of which they accuse me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.”

¹²So Festus, after conferring with his council, answered, “You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you shall go.”

¹³Some days later King Agrippa and his sister Bernice arrived in Caesarea to greet Festus. As they were to stay there several days, Festus told the king about Paul’s case and said to him,

¹⁴“We have here a man whom Felix left as a prisoner. ¹⁵When I was in Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews accused him

and asked me to sentence him. ¹⁶I told them that it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over a man without giving him an opportunity to defend himself in front of his accusers. ¹⁷So they came and I took my seat without delay on the tribunal and sent for the man.

¹⁸When the accusers had the floor, they did not accuse him of any of the crimes that I was led to think he had committed; ¹⁹instead they quarreled with him about religion and about a certain Jesus who has died but whom Paul asserted to be alive. ²⁰I did not know what to do about this case, so I asked Paul if he wanted to go to Jerusalem to be tried there. ²¹But Paul appealed to be judged by the emperor. So I ordered that he be kept in custody until I send him to Caesar.” ²²Agrippa said to Festus: “I would like to hear that man.” Festus answered him: “Tomorrow you shall.”

²³On the following day, Agrippa and Bernice arrived with great ceremony and entered the audience hall with the commanders and the elders of the city. Festus ordered that Paul be brought in and said:

²⁴“King Agrippa and all here present, here you see this man about whom the whole community of the Jews came to see me, in Jerusalem as well as here, protesting loudly that he must not live. ²⁵I, for my part, am convinced that he has not done anything that deserves death. But after he appealed to be judged by the emperor, I decided to send him on. ²⁶Well, if I have no definite information, what can I write to Caesar about him? Therefore I present him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, that you may examine him and that I may know what to write. ²⁷For it seems absurd to me to send a prisoner without indicating the charges against him.”

Paul's speech before King Agrippa

26 • Agrippa said to Paul: “You may speak in your own defense.” So Paul stretched out his hand and began in this way:

²“King Agrippa, you have just heard about the accusations of the Jews. I consider myself fortunate in having the opportunity to defend myself against all this before you today, ³for you are an expert in the customs of the Jews and their disputes. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

⁴All the Jews know how I have lived from my youth, how I have lived among my own people and in Jerusalem. ⁵They have always known me and they can tell you, if they wish, that I have lived as a Pharisee in the most rigorous sect of our religion. ⁶If I am now tried here, it is because of the hope I have in the promise made by God to our ancestors. ⁷The hope of attaining this promise is behind the fervent worship that our twelve tribes render to God night and day. Yet now, O king,

the Jews accuse me for this hope! ⁸But why refuse to believe that God raises the dead?

⁹I myself in the beginning thought that I had to use all possible means to counteract the Name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰This I did in Jerusalem and, with the authorization of the chief priests, I put in prison many who believed; and I cast my vote when they were condemned to death.

¹¹I went round the synagogues and multiplied punishments against them to force them to renounce their faith; such was my rage against them that I pursued them even to foreign cities.

¹²With this purpose in mind I went to Damascus with full authority and commissioned by the chief priests.

¹³On the way, O King, at midday I saw a light from heaven, more brilliant than the sun, that dazzled me and those who accompanied me.

¹⁴We all fell to the ground and I heard a voice saying to me in Hebrew: Saul, Saul, why do you persecute

Rom
4:17;
Heb
11:19

9; 22

• **26.1** Paul did not have the best audience for his speech: an operetta king, Agrippa, to whom the Roman governor, the real authority, wishes to make a gesture; the famous Bernice, sister of Agrippa, who is his concubine before going off to make other conquests; and then all those who have come for a moment of relaxation before the cocktail, including the Roman officers who know very little of the religious quarrels among Jews. So we have a third account of Paul's conversion (see chaps. 9 and 22). This time, Paul shows his conversion is not surprising: he has found what God had for so long promised his people: the resurrection of the dead.

I asked them to repent. It is precisely what the prophets said. It was not enough to proclaim oneself a Jew; all had to convert. And here, Paul speaks openly before this audience who are not outstanding in their moral virtue, except perhaps the Roman Festus.

That the Messiah would rise from the dead. Here again is the decisive point. Paul questions the religion of many Christians who,

according to polls accept Christ as Word of God but do not believe in the resurrection. Something beyond death? Perhaps... “I am not like those who think they know everything, I'm searching...” Precisely, as long as we are searching we have not taken the leap of faith. To accept Christ, is to renounce the totalitarian reason with its proven truths. Reason is at home in science but shortsighted in the face of essential truths. As long as there is no belief in the resurrection, there is no understanding of human destiny: a person may be educated, have a religious culture but be unable to grasp the truth. Even if the words of St. Anselm shock us, they are true: “Believe in order to understand.”

Paul is not so preoccupied about defending himself as he is about convincing others: Agrippa and Festus are people like everyone else and they need Christ. Festus is amazed by Paul's biblical background and his enthusiasm: Agrippa, moved, says nothing. In fact, if they have been impressed, uneasiness will soon pass: “serious matters” will again take up their time.

me? In vain do you kick against the goad.’

¹⁵I answered: ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said: ‘I am Jesus whom you persecute. ¹⁶Get up now and stand on your feet. I have revealed myself to you to make you servant and witness to what I have just shown you and to what I will show you later on. ¹⁷I will rescue you from all evil that may come from your own people or from the pagans to whom I am sending you. ¹⁸For you shall open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God; and, through faith in me, may obtain forgiveness of their sins and a place among those who are sanctified.’

¹⁹Since that time, King Agrippa, I did not stray from this heavenly vision; ²⁰on the contrary, I began preaching first to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and throughout Judea, and then to the pagan nations, that they should repent and turn to God, showing the fruits of true conversion. ²¹I was carrying out this mission when the Jews arrested me in the Temple and tried to kill me. But with the help of God, I still stand here today to give my testimony both to the great and the small.

²²I do not teach anything other than what Moses and the Prophets announced beforehand: ²³the Messiah had to die, and after being the first to be raised from the dead, he would proclaim the light to his people as well as to all nations.’

²⁴As Paul came to this point of his defense, Festus said in a loud voice: ‘Paul, you are mad; your great learn-

ing has deranged your mind!’ ²⁵But Paul answered: ‘I am not mad, Most Excellent Festus, but everything I have said is reliable and true. ²⁶The king is acquainted with all these things, so to him I speak with such confidence. I am convinced that he knows everything about this case, for these things did not happen in a dark corner. ²⁷King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.’

²⁸Agrippa said to him: ‘You almost believe that you have already made me a Christian!’ ²⁹Paul answered him: ‘Whether little or more, I would that not only you but all who hear me this day may come to be as I am—except for these chains.’

³⁰Then the king rose and, with him, the governor, Bernice and all the attendants. ³¹When they went out they talked among themselves and said: ‘This man has done nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.’ ³²And Agrippa said to Festus: ‘Had he not appealed to Caesar, he could have been set free.’

Departure for Rome

27 ¹When it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they handed over Paul and the other prisoners into the care of an officer of the Augustan battalion, named Julius. ²We boarded a ship of Adramyttium bound for the Asian coasts, and we left accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from the city of Thessalonica. ³We arrived at Sidon on the next day. Julius was very kind to Paul, letting him visit his friends and be cared for by them. ⁴From there, we sailed along the sheltered coast

Is 42:6;
Jer 1:5

20:32;
Col 1:12

9:27;
Lk 3:8

19:21;
23:11

13:47;
Lk 2:32;
24:46;
1Cor
15:20;
Col 1:18

19:29;
20:4

24:23;
28:16

• **27.1** Paul is taken to Rome with a group of prisoners. It is not difficult for us to imagine that even if the officer *shows him much consideration* his situation is not all comfort. This

officer has his own authority besides that of the ship’s captain: the soldiers know that if a prisoner should escape, his guard would be executed (see 12:19 and 27:42). This account is

of Cyprus, because the winds were against us. ⁵We sailed across the seas off Cilicia and Pamphylia and arrived at Myra in Lycia. ⁶There the captain found a ship from Alexandria sailing for Italy and made us board it.

⁷We sailed slowly for several days, and arrived with great difficulty at Cnidus. As the wind did not allow us to enter that port, we sailed for the shelter of Crete with the Cape of Salmone within sight. ⁸We turned with difficulty and arrived at a place called Good Ports, near the city of Lasea.

⁹Time passed and the crossing began to be dangerous: we had already celebrated the feast of the Fast. ¹⁰Then Paul said to them: “Friends, I believe that it would not be very wise to proceed with our crossing for we could lose not only the cargo and the ship but also our lives.” ¹¹But the Roman officer relied more on the ship’s captain and the owner of the ship than on the words of Paul. ¹²And as the port was not suitable for wintering, the majority agreed to set out from there in the hope of reaching the harbor of Crete called Phoenix, overlooking Africa and Choros, where they could spend the winter.

Storm and shipwreck

¹³Then the south wind began to blow and they thought that they had gained their purpose; they weighed anchor and sailed along the island of Crete. ¹⁴But a little later, a strong wind called “the northeaster” swept down on them, from across the island. ¹⁵The ship was dragged along

and could not face the wind, so that we remained adrift.

¹⁶As we were crossing under the lee of the small island of Cauda, we managed—but with effort—to secure the lifeboat. ¹⁷After lifting it aboard, they used cables to undergird the hull, and since we feared running aground on the sands of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor. So we continued to be dragged along.

¹⁸The storm lashed at us so strongly that on the next day they began throwing the cargo overboard. ¹⁹On the third day the sailors with their own hands threw out the ship’s gear. ²⁰For several days neither the sun nor the stars could be seen, and the tempest had not subsided: we lost all hope of saving ourselves.

²¹As we had not eaten for days, Paul stood up among them and said: “Friends, if you had followed my advice when I told you not to set sail from Crete, we would not be in such danger now, and we could have avoided this loss. ²²But now I invite you to regain courage for no one among you shall die; only the ship shall be destroyed. ²³Last night there appeared to me an angel of my God to whom I serve, ²⁴and he said to me: ‘Paul, do not be afraid, you must present yourself before Caesar’s tribunal, and God has guaranteed you the life of all those who sail with you.’

²⁵Have courage, therefore, my friends, for I trust in God that it will be just as he told me. ²⁶But we have to run aground on some island.”

²⁷Near midnight on the fourteenth night, as we were drifting in the Adriatic Sea, the sailors suspected that

9:15;
18:9;
Mt 10:18

a very interesting document on navigation in the Mediterranean at that time. Luke has given plentiful details: what a contrast with the account of Jonah and the tempest, written doubtless by someone who had never sailed. It is obvious that Paul was familiar with this kind

of journeying: in 2 Corinthians 11:25, he states having been shipwrecked three times. Paul’s inner strength stands out in the description of the storm: Paul knows he is to testify before the tribunal of the emperor.

land was near. ²⁸They measured the depth of the water and it was thirty-seven meters. After a while, they measured it again and it was twenty-seven meters. ²⁹They feared that we might hit some rocks, so they cast out four anchors from the stern and waited anxiously for morning. ³⁰Then the sailors tried to escape from the ship under the pretext of extending the cables of the anchors from the bow, so they lowered the lifeboat into the sea. ³¹But Paul said to the captain and to the soldiers: "If they leave the ship, you cannot be saved." ³²So the soldiers cut the mooring cables of the boat and let it fall.

³³As they waited for dawn, Paul urged everyone: "For fourteen days you have not eaten anything because of anxious waiting. ³⁴I ask you to eat now if you want to live; be sure that not even a hair of your head will be lost." ³⁵Having said this, he took bread, gave thanks to God in everybody's presence, broke it and began to eat. ³⁶All were encouraged and they too ate. ³⁷They were two hundred and seventy-six persons in all. ³⁸When they had eaten enough, they threw the wheat into the sea to lighten the boat.

³⁹When morning came, they did not recognize the land but noticed a bay with a beach, so they decided to run the ship aground, if possible. ⁴⁰They cast off the anchors and left them in the sea; at the same time, they loosened the ropes of the rudders, hoisted the foresail to the wind and headed for the beach. ⁴¹But they struck a sandbank and the ship ran aground. The bow stuck and was im-

movable, while the stern was broken up by the violent waves.

⁴²The soldiers then planned to kill the prisoners for fear that some of them might escape by swimming. ⁴³But the captain, who wished to save Paul, did not allow them to do this. He ordered those who knew how to swim, to be the first to jump into the water and head for the shore, ⁴⁴and the rest to hold on to planks or pieces of the ship. So all of us reached land safe and sound.

On Malta

28 ¹After being saved, we learned that the island was called Malta. ²The natives were very cordial. They lit a big bonfire and took good care of us all, since it was raining and cold.

³Paul gathered a bundle of dried twigs and as he threw them into the fire, a viper suddenly came out because of the heat and entwined itself around his hand. ⁴When the natives saw the viper hanging from his hand, they said to one another: "Surely this man is a murderer: he has barely escaped from the raging sea, yet divine justice will not allow him to live."

⁵But Paul shook off the viper into the fire and did not suffer any harm. They waited to see him swell and die; ⁶but after observing him for a while they saw that nothing happened to him, so they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god.

⁷Near this place was an estate owned by the head of the island, named Publius. For three days this man welcomed us hospitably. ⁸It so

12:19;
16:272Cor
11:26

Mt 10:30

Lk 10:19;
Mk 16:18

12:22

• **28.1** Paul almost perished at sea; on approaching the shore he narrowly escaped being butchered by his guards, and then the episode of the viper: see the promises of Jesus in Mark 16:17-18. Note the first gesture of

Paul on arriving at a place the Gospel had not yet reached: he will heal the sick in the name of Christ. Would that he come and do the same in our peripheral urban areas where it seems, the Church has not yet disembarked.

Lk 4:40;
Jas 5:14

happened that his father was in bed with fever and dysentery. Paul went to see him; he prayed and laid his hands on him and healed him. ⁹Because of this, the rest of the sick people on the island came to see him and were cured. ¹⁰So they showered us with kindness, and on our departure they provided us with everything we needed.

From Malta to Rome

• ¹¹After three months, we boarded a ship that had spent the winter at the island. It belonged to an Alexandrian company and carried the figurehead of Castor and Pollux as insignia. ¹²We sailed for Syracuse, staying there for three days ¹³and, after circling the coast, we arrived at Rhegium. On the following day, a south wind began to blow, and at the end of two days we arrived at Puteoli, ¹⁴where we found some of our brothers who invited us to stay with them for a week. And that was how we came to Rome.

¹⁵There the brothers and sisters had been informed of our arrival and came out to meet us as far as the Appian Forum and the Three Taverns. When Paul saw them, he gave thanks to God and took courage.

¹⁶Upon our arrival in Rome, the captain turned the prisoners over to the military governor but permitted Paul

to lodge in a private house with the soldier who guarded him.

Paul meets the Jews in Rome

• ¹⁷After three days, Paul called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had gathered, he said to them: “Brothers, though I have not done anything against our people or against the traditions of our fathers, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. ¹⁸They examined me and wanted to set me free, for they saw nothing in my case that deserved death. ¹⁹But the Jews objected, so I was forced to appeal to Caesar without the least intention of bringing any case against my own people. ²⁰Therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I bear these chains.”

²¹They answered: “We have not received any letter about you from Judea, and none of the brothers who have come from there have brought any message or said anything against you. ²²But we wish to hear from you what you think, although we know already that everywhere people speak against this sect that you belong to.”

²³They set a day for him and came in great numbers to his lodging. So Paul explained everything he wanted to tell them regarding the

26:6

Lk 24:27;
24:44

• 11. When they get to Rome, Paul is treated fairly well. Instead of being put in jail, he is allowed to stay in the city, handcuffed (with his right arm tied to the left arm of the guard).

• 17. In Rome, Paul immediately wants to meet the authorities of the Jewish community. At this particular time, even if Judaism generally rejected Christian preaching, there had been no official condemnation. Christianity was for them a “sect,” a group, such as Pharisaism or the Essenes. Aware of how news traveled from one community to another in the Jewish world, Paul wanted to make the first move.

For him, it is important not to be considered as a traitor to his country for accusing the Jewish authorities. He is even more anxious to openly attack the refusal to believe in Jesus. The Christian community has already done what it could do among the Jews in Rome but he wants to strike harder.

Luke wished to end his book with the account of this meeting. Here Paul repeats almost all that he said when he first preached at Antioch of Pisidia (13:46-47): the Gospel is to be first preached to the Jews, but if they reject it, that will not prevent the word of God being proclaimed to all the nations.

kingdom of God and tried to convince them concerning Jesus, taking the Law of Moses and the Prophets as his starting point. This continued from morning till night. ²⁴Some were convinced by his words, others were not. ²⁵Finally the Jews left, still arguing strongly among themselves; and Paul sent them away with this statement: "What the Holy Spirit said has come true, when he spoke to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah:

17:4;
18:6

Is 6:9-10;
Mt 13:14;
Jn 12:40

²⁶*Go to this people and say to them: However much you hear, you will not understand; you will see and see again but not perceive.*

²⁷*The heart of this people has grown hard; they have covered their ears and closed their eyes, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest their spirit understand, and I should heal them.*

• ²⁸Let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the pagans: they will listen."

13:45;
18:6;
Is 40:5

³⁰Paul stayed for two whole years in a house he himself rented, where he received without any hindrance all those who came to see him. ³¹He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught the truth about Jesus Christ, the Lord, quite openly and without any hindrance.

2Tim 2:9;
Mt 28:20

• 28. *This salvation of God has been sent to the pagans:* This is one of Luke's favorite themes. It had been announced in the prophecy to Simeon (Lk 2:30) and this theme marked the beginning of the ministry of Jesus (Lk 3:6).

Paul stayed for two whole years in a house, that is to say, in semi-captivity. This was the time set by the law for preventive de-

tentions. Therefore, it is most likely that everything ended up in a dismissal. Some claim that it was then that Paul was condemned to death. Luke would have had no reason to keep it quiet and even less, to hint at a change of residence.

Without any hindrance. That is the last word: the Gospel has gone out to conquer and nothing will stop it (Rev 6:2).

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