

9. April 2021

## “The witness of Peter”

*Acts 4:1-12*

*While they were still talking to the people the priests came up to them, accompanied by the captain of the Temple and the Sadducees. They were extremely annoyed at their teaching the people the resurrection from the dead by proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus. They arrested them, and, as it was already late, they kept them in prison till the next day. But many of those who had listened to their message became believers; the total number of men had now risen to something like five thousand. It happened that the next day the rulers, elders and scribes held a meeting in Jerusalem with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, Jonathan, Alexander and all the members of the high-priestly families. They made the prisoners stand in the middle and began to interrogate them, 'By what power, and by whose name have you men done this?' Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, addressed them, 'Rulers of the people, and elders! If you are questioning us today about an act of kindness to a cripple and asking us how he was healed, you must know, all of you, and the whole people of Israel, that it is by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, and God raised from the dead, by this name and by no other that this man stands before you cured. This is the stone which you, the builders, rejected but which has become the cornerstone. Only in him is there salvation; for of all the names in the world given to men, this is the only one by which we can be saved.'*

The preaching of the apostles bears great fruit and significant signs happen through them.

God opens people's ears and hearts and they accept the faith. For those who had hoped that with the death of Jesus and the denial of Christ's resurrection the cause would die, the preaching of the apostles becomes a threat. They do not know how to deal with it and arrest Peter and John.

All the major religious authorities gather to question them as to the power in which they healed the paralytic. Thus they give Peter the opportunity to give a glorious public testimony in which all the essentials are contained. Peter obviously speaks without fear, strengthened by the Holy Spirit. He, who only a short time ago denied the Lord in the tribulation (*cf. Mk 14:66-72*), is not afraid to speak clear before

those leaders of the people who were responsible for the death of Jesus. He is certainly aware of the danger, for we have already heard in the Gospel that these people shrank from nothing.

How does this transformation of Peter come about?

Before the resurrection of the Lord, we got to know Peter as a fiery disciple who really loved the Lord and had left everything for His sake (*cf. Mt 19:27*). Some events around Peter that were reported show that the Lord instructed him in a special way and that he had a privileged position in the circle of the disciples (*cf. e.g. Acts 1:15*).

The experience of denying his Lord and Master out of fear shook him deeply. He wept bitterly, we are told in the Scriptures (*cf. Lk 22:62*). This deep repentance brought about an even stronger devotion to Jesus and also a spiritual maturing of his person. He experienced that his human love for Jesus was not enough to remain faithful to him in the strong affliction.

Then came the special commissioning of the Risen Lord to feed the Lord's flock. Three times the Lord asked if Peter loved him and three times Peter answered yes. The Lord gave him the opportunity to make amends for his three times of denial and in this way healed his wound of apostasy (*cf. Jn 21:15-19*). Thus strengthened and sent, Peter was now filled with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, which enlightened him and made him recognise the ways of salvation more precisely. With the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, the gift of strength became especially effective. This is what completes virtue and makes us capable of carrying out our task even in the face of danger.

This Peter, thus transformed, now stands before us and bears witness. It is Jesus in whose name the healing of the paralytic took place, and Peter uses the opportunity to speak to say even more important things about the Lord, which must have been difficult for closed hearts to take in: *“Only in him is there salvation; for of all the names in the world given to men, this is the only one by which we can be saved.”*

Now this is the exquisite task of Peter: he is to feed and protect the flock, lest wolves creep in and the poison of false doctrine and practice spread. He and his followers have to watch over it so that the Gospel comes authentically in its uniqueness to all peoples. No philosophy, no other religion, no spiritual system, no political direction, no matter how sophisticated, can give people what Peter had to

proclaim to them: the true salvation of man, the salvation of mankind through the name of Jesus.

Let us be fully awakened by Peter's glorious testimony and witness to the faith through word and deed with him and his followers, who faithfully hold on to the uniqueness of the Lord's mission of salvation! The Lord will reward us if we serve Him and the people in this way.