

5. May 2025

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

“Obedience to God comes first”

Acts 4:13-22

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they wondered; and they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man that had been healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred with one another, saying, “What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is manifest to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to any one in this name.” So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people; for all men praised God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

Unfortunately, the religious authorities of the people of Israel did not know how to interpret the signs that were so clearly before their eyes: uneducated and uncultured men, who were at the same time courageous disciples of Jesus, proclaimed with authority; the obvious sign of the healing of the cripple, which in the meantime had spread throughout Jerusalem, was undeniable. But their blindness was deep-rooted, and it is feared that some of them were 'wilfully blind', that is, they did not want to see any more, no matter what. The religious authorities had no choice but to order the apostles 'not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus'.

With this prohibition they had gone far beyond the limits of their authority. Indeed, the legitimacy of religious authority does not derive from itself, but from God's commission and conformity to His will.

If the orders of persons who in principle have legitimate authority are found to be contrary to God's Will, they cannot be obeyed at all; to obey them would be to become an accomplice and to act, even unintentionally, against the Lord. Religious authority is not an absolute regime to which one must submit unconditionally, but a service to truth.

Consequently, the apostles did not obey the prohibitions of the Sanhedrin, nor were they intimidated by its threats, which became stronger the more the authorities feared the reaction of the people.

In this context, Peter and John uttered those decisive words which we can still apply today in the existential crisis of the Church: *“Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge”*.

There is a limit to all human obedience when it comes into conflict with God. This applies to all areas of life, and especially to religious life. It is worth repeating this, because it is often misunderstood: it is not a virtue to obey orders that go against one's conscience. This also applies to the political sphere: God is the Lord of life, and He alone is to be obeyed absolutely and to the full!

That is why the Apostles rightly reject the orders of the Sanhedrin, because, as today's reading makes clear, the religious authorities have no right to forbid them to proclaim the Lord. Peter and John give a very wise reply, telling them that they themselves must judge whether it is right in the eyes of God to obey them rather than God.

The two apostles insist very convincingly that they cannot but speak of what they have seen and heard. They are committed to the truth and to God's command, and nothing and no one can stop them from proclaiming the Lord, even at the cost of their lives.

We can pause for a moment and ask ourselves this question: what would have happened if the Apostles had obeyed, if they had stopped preaching the Gospel and performing

miracles in Jesus' Name out of false obedience to the authorities of the day? The answer would be tragic!

After all, the Sanhedrin had to release them. Unfortunately, they did not do so out of conviction, but out of fear of the people. The proclamation of the Gospel had to go on. Even if all the powers of darkness rose up to stop it, God is the Lord and He will overcome every obstacle placed in the way of the Apostles, then and now.

Meditation on the day's reading: <https://en.elijamission.net/the-triumph-of-light-2/>

Meditation on the day's Gospel: <https://en.elijamission.net/the-precious-teachings-of-jesus-2/>