

6. May 2025

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

“The prayer of the early Church for courage”

Acts 4:23-31

When they [Peter and John] were released they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who by the mouth of our father David, thy servant, didst say by the Holy Spirit,

‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things? The kings of the earth set themselves in array, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’-

for truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, while thou stretchest out thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant Jesus.” And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.

Today we hear a powerful prayer from the mouth of the early church after they had faced the first persecution from the religious authorities in Jerusalem. As we saw in the previous passage from the Acts of the Apostles, this persecution had strengthened them and they had withstood all threats. Moreover, the Lord had worked a healing through the apostles, which was a credit to their testimony.

Now Peter and John, after their brief arrest, returned to their own and together they lifted up their voices to God with one accord. They had realised that they were in the midst of a battle: “*Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things? The*

kings of the earth set themselves in array, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed”.

Indeed, to proclaim the Gospel boldly is to enter into the war that the powers of darkness, together with their human collaborators, have waged against God, against the truth, against the Lord's Anointed.

Later, Saint Paul will describe this struggle in more detail, pointing out that it is a struggle *"against the principalities, against the powers (...) and against the spiritual hosts of wickedness"* (Eph 6:12). Above all, it is the Word of God - that is, evangelisation - that frees man from the clutches of evil and removes him from the dominion of the prince of this world, if he repents and obeys God. The apostles of the early Church were in the vanguard, to put it in martial terms. For this battle they need firm faith and courage, for as members of the Lamb's army they will be exposed to all the persecutions that their Lord suffered. Jesus had foretold what would happen to them (Jn 15:20); now they were beginning to endure it.

The situation they had just faced inspired them to a prayer with authority. Far from shrinking from the persecution they had suffered, they asked the Lord to give them the courage to preach His Word. It cannot be stopped. No threat can prevent it from spreading. On the contrary, the early Church asks for the power to 'heal and [that] signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant Jesus'.

We can see this as an attack on the strongholds of the enemy who, through the religious authorities in Jerusalem, seek to prevent people from knowing the message of the Gospel with its accompanying signs and wonders. But the enemies did not count on the Holy Spirit, who now assisted and strengthened the apostles. When the Christian community had finished praying, 'the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness'.

Looking at today's date, we are only one day away from the beginning of the Conclave in Rome, in which the Cardinals will elect a new Pope. We look wistfully at the strength of the early Church in Jerusalem and the fearlessness with which a Peter proclaimed the Gospel, even in the face of his enemies, without making any false concessions. A Peter who, in collaboration with the Holy Spirit, had become the rock of the nascent Church and was at the service of the truth. We see no political tactics or alliances with the world.

Peter knows that people must embrace the faith to be saved. No other religion is a way to God. The Heavenly Father has shown us the only way by sending us His Son.

On the other hand, how far the present leadership of the Church has departed from these convictions in many ways! Sadly, there are those who, consciously or unconsciously, have allied themselves against the Lord and His Anointed and are working to destroy the Church. Many have cooperated and many others have remained silent. Now a new Pope is to be chosen from among them. Will someone like the prophet Daniel rise up to confront those responsible and ask them why they have allowed all this which has so darkened the witness of the Church? Should there not be a clarification before an election can take place?

We need a Peter at the head of the Church who is faithful to the doctrine and morals of the Church and who will uphold them. Someone who does not fulfil these conditions wouldn't serve her!

Meditation on the day's reading: <https://en.elijamission.net/st-stephen-and-the-mercy-of-god-2/>

Meditation on the Gospel of the day: <https://en.elijamission.net/the-spiritual-hunger/>