

9. May 2025

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

“The Apostles before the Sanhedrin”

Acts 5:21b-33

The high priest came and those who were with him and called together the council and all the senate of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, and they returned and reported, “We found the prison securely locked and the sentries standing at the doors, but when we opened it we found no one inside.” Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were much perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. And some one came and told them, “The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.” Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but without violence, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.” When they heard this they were enraged and wanted to kill them.

The apostles did as the angel had commanded them after their release from prison: they went to the Temple and began to teach the people. The Israelites were to learn the truth and understand that the long-awaited Messiah had come to free His people from all the chains of sin and to make them messengers of salvation.

But the persecutors gave no respite. Even the fact that the apostles were inexplicably released from prison did not bring them to their senses. So they arrested them again, but they could not take them by force. Evidently, the people disliked the actions of the

authorities so much that the officers were afraid they would be stoned if they resorted to force. The apostles were brought before the Sanhedrin, and the high priest began to question them. He reminded them that they had been strictly forbidden to teach in the name of Jesus. Peter and the apostles, however, did not feel bound by this command and boldly answered, *"We must obey God rather than men"*.

Before the high priest, the apostles appealed to the supreme authority to which all human authority is subject: God himself. This is the supreme authority to which man's freedom is subject. Of course, such an appeal cannot be abused for one's own interests or to avoid submission to a legitimate human authority. It is in the right use of freedom that man's true dignity is revealed. In this way he clings to God, his Father, and obeys him willingly and lovingly as his child and cooperator. All other authority is subordinate to this.

The apostles were at the service of God's great work: the salvation of humanity. Their message had been confirmed by miracles and wonders. The high priest and all the religious leaders should have been the first to welcome the Messiah sent by the Father and to serve him with joy and gratitude. He had been foretold by the prophets of old. Unfortunately, they failed to do so, but did with him as they pleased.

Now, as they saw how the apostles served this mission and could perceive that the power of Jesus was still at work through them, they were presented with a new opportunity for conversion. Surely they had heard of the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. We might say that God had given them a second chance to recognise His design. In many of the religious leaders the words of Jesus could have come true: *"Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old"* (Mt 13:52), as well as those of the Old Testament: *"Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever"* (Dn 12:3).

Unfortunately, the reality was different. Although the apostles again gave clear testimony, making them see that with the coming of the Lord Jesus they were offered conversion and forgiveness of sins, and that God would give the Holy Spirit to all who obeyed Him, the hearts of their accusers remained closed. Far from being converted when they heard the Apostles' message, "they were enraged and wanted to kill them".

What a human tragedy and what a rejection of God's love we see in the actions of the high priest and those with him! However, what sustains us in spite of everything is the inexhaustible love of God, who does not give up in His struggle for man and will continue to seek him until the end of time.

Meditation on the day's reading: <https://en.elijamission.net/the-great-miracle-of-conversion/>

Meditation on the day's Gospel: <https://en.elijamission.net/the-bread-of-life/>