

10. May 2025

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

“The counsel of Gamaliel”

Acts 5:34-42

A Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, held in honor by all the people, stood up and ordered the men to be put outside for a while. And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you do with these men. For before these days Theudas arose, giving himself out to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was slain and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him Judas the Galilean arose in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered. So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!” So they took his advice, and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

What a relief! At least there is one who still knows how to use reason in the midst of this assembly of the Lord's adversaries, who seem to be blinded by hatred. Gamaliel had evidently not been infected by the hostile atmosphere that prevailed in the Sanhedrin, and had preserved his freedom of thought and expression.

Was this work that the Sanhedrin saw emerging before their eyes from God or not? It is not entirely clear how Gamaliel would have answered this question.

But he does point out the criteria by which the accusers could best deal with the events surrounding the apostles. Because of their blindness, they were no longer able or willing to understand that God was at work through the apostles. They had closed their hearts

and every word, sign or miracle that happened in the name of Jesus became a reason to harden them even more.

Nothing could change their minds anymore. But Gamaliel's advice at least opened up the possibility for the apostles to continue their mission. After all, their opponents did not want to be exposed as God's enemies, fighting against what was His work. In this sense, Gamaliel's wise counsel may have temporarily defused the situation.

However, it did not prevent them from cruelly beating the apostles and thus exposing their wickedness. The growth of their hostility was only temporarily checked, partly motivated by self-protection. But the fire of hostility continued to burn. Once again they ordered the apostles not to speak in Jesus' name and then released them.

And what did the apostles do? The Spirit of the Lord had already worked so powerfully in them that instead of grieving over the unjust treatment they had received, they *"left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name"*, as the Bible text puts it.

The Lord had done a great work in them, because the natural and justified reaction would have been to reject the unjust treatment and to suffer from it, because it not only hurts the body, as in the case of the punishment to which they were subjected, but it also attacks the honour of the person and seeks to denigrate him: an act of violence against innocent people. In the case of the Apostles, the injustice is all the more serious because, in addition to being innocent, they were people who did good for the people and through whom many healings had taken place. It is therefore a most unjust and despicable act on the part of the religious authorities of the time.

The natural reaction can only be overcome by uniting one's suffering with that of Christ, knowing that He too, being innocent, suffered and was unjustly mistreated for the sake of the truth and for our sake. This can serve as a lesson for us. But we can only walk this inner path if we are deeply united to the Lord. It may be a process that takes time. Of course, the apostles had already walked this path, so they could even experience a spiritual joy in being like Jesus in this humiliation.

All these trials gave them more strength to preach the Gospel, and no doubt their conviction was deepened as they suffered persecution for the Lord's sake. Such

experiences can discourage weak souls who need support. But it makes strong souls even more determined. There is no doubt that the spirit of fortitude was at work in the apostles, which is why *"every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ"*.

Meditation on the day's reading: <https://en.elijamission.net/signs-and-miracles-in-the-service-of-evangelisation/>

Meditation on the day's Gospel: <https://en.elijamission.net/it-is-the-spirit-that-gives-life-2/>