

14. May 2025

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

“Peter and John in Samaria”

Acts 8:14-25

When the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, “Give me also this power, that any one on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” But Peter said to him, “Your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.” And Simon answered, “Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.” Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

Philip's ministry in Samaria had borne much fruit, so Peter and John set out to lay hands on the new converts. The Holy Spirit was to descend upon them to strengthen them, enlighten them and enable them to witness to the Lord with authority. In our Church we know the Sacrament of Confirmation in which the Bishop lays hands on the baptised to receive the Holy Spirit.

As we saw in yesterday's passage, Simon, who had impressed that city of Samaria with his magic, was himself so impressed by Philip's preaching and the signs he performed that he embraced the faith. However, he had not understood something essential about the laying on of the apostles' hands. Seeing the Holy Spirit descending on the new converts, Simon thought he could buy with money this gift of God that he saw at work in the apostles.

But Peter sharply rebuked him, and his words apply to all those who think they can buy God's gift with money, as well as to those who seek material gain from God's gifts: *"Your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!"*

Indeed, throughout the history of the Church there has been the sin of 'simony', that is, the pretence of buying spiritual goods (such as an ecclesiastical ministry) with material goods. The Popes have always vigorously condemned this sin, which takes its name precisely from the deception of Simon Magus in the passage we have just heard.

On the other hand, all those who wish to serve the Gospel must follow the words of the Lord: *"Preach as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without pay, give without pay"* (Mt 10:7-8).

In order to maintain purity in evangelisation, it is important to make a clear distinction between the gifts of God, whatever they may be, and material interests of any kind. The handling of money is one of the most sensitive issues in the Church and should not be mixed up. When the faithful make a material contribution to the Church, they want the money to be used for the interests of the Lord and not for the personal enrichment of anyone. It is a painful chapter when the money entrusted to them is misused. Peter's severe rebuke to the newly converted Simon should serve as a warning to us to be very vigilant and not to allow ourselves to be corrupted by "unrighteous mammon" (cf. Lk 16:9).

The apostles Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, but not before preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages. The Gospel had been set in motion and could not be stopped, for no doubt the new converts would tell others what had happened to them. God Himself had opened the doors for evangelization, and no one can ever close them again. Thanks to the Acts of the Apostles, we can witness how the early Church carried out her mission with great zeal and willingness to endure much suffering. God was glorified in her.

Philip had fulfilled his mission in Samaria, and tomorrow we will hear how an angel gives him concrete instructions about his next destination. In this we can see the wonderful collaboration between the heavenly Church and the Church militant. Sacred

Scripture speaks quite naturally of the intervention of angels, and the signs and miracles performed by the apostles in the name of Jesus were an obvious part of the proclamation.

What about today? No doubt we still believe in holy angels, and signs and wonders do happen. But it would be a joy if these signs were more present in the evangelization of our time, to give glory to God, to give credibility to the message, and to effectively show people the loving kindness of the heavenly Father.

Feast of St Matthias the Apostle:

Meditation on the day's Reading: <https://en.elijamission.net/acts-of-the-apostles-acts-113-26-the-choice-of-matthias/>

Meditation on the day's Gospel: <https://en.elijamission.net/aspects-of-the-imitation-of-christ/>