

19. May 2025

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

“The vision of Peter and Cornelius”

Acts 10:1-8

At Caesare'a there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms liberally to the people, and prayed constantly to God. About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, “Cornelius.” And he stared at him in terror, and said, “What is it, Lord?” And he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and bring one Simon who is called Peter; he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside.” When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those that waited on him, and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

During the initial phase of evangelisation, the collaboration between the heavenly Church and people was, so to speak, quite 'natural'. Angels appeared to people to provide guidance, or the Lord Himself appeared to them in visions. We have heard the account of St Paul's conversion and how God intervened directly and gave him sure guidance.

Today's passage tells of an angel appearing to Cornelius, a centurion of the Roman occupation who is described as a 'devout man who feared God'. The angel instructs Cornelius to send for Peter, who was in Joppa at the time. The centurion sends two servants to find Peter. Our Father wants to draw him to faith in His Son Jesus Christ, and thus begin to spread the proclamation of the Gospel to those who do not belong to the people of Israel.

While the servants were on their way, the Lord prepared Peter for his meeting with Cornelius through a vision, giving him a new understanding that would have far-reaching consequences for the mission.

The Acts of the Apostles recounts what happened to Peter at the same time:

“He fell into a trance and saw the heaven opened, and something descending, like a great sheet, let down by four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” But Peter said, “No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has cleansed, you must not call common.” This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.” (Acts 10:10b-16)

Peter still had to grasp that the grace that came into the world with Jesus Christ was offered to all people, meaning the apostles' mission had to extend far beyond the confines of the People of Israel, as it had been until then. While it is true that the Messiah, in the Person of Jesus, came first of all to the Jews, who had long been prepared to receive Him, after His Resurrection, He instructed His disciples to go into all the world, baptise all peoples and teach them to keep His commandments (Mt 28:19-20).

Let us continue to read the account in the Acts of the Apostles:

“While Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down, and accompany them without hesitation; for I have sent them.” And Peter went down to the men and said, “I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?” And they said, “Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house, and to hear what you have to say.” (Acts 10:19-22)

The doors of evangelisation were wide open and we see that God Himself had prepared the way. This is an important lesson for us if we have dedicated ourselves to serving our Father in bearing witness to the Lord. The fruitfulness of the mission is not primarily defined by our own efforts and knowledge. Above all, it is a matter of listening to and following the promptings of the Holy Spirit. This is what Holy Scripture teaches us.

It is not only in the early Church that the Holy Spirit worked so powerfully and clearly through supernatural visions and experiences, and today this would no longer be the case. The Holy Spirit certainly knows various ways of communicating with us.

However, all of these ways have one common goal: to proclaim the Gospel to all peoples. No one is excluded from the Good News! However, if the missionary mandate of Jesus is no longer the goal, and other ideas gain ground claiming that this is no longer absolutely necessary since there are other equally valid ways to God, this would indicate that the guidance of the Holy Spirit has been replaced by human reasoning and deception.

Peter, for his part, follows his Lord's instructions and sets out with the servants for the house of Cornelius, where he continues to recognise and serve God's wonders. A great step will be taken there in the mission entrusted to the apostles.

Meditation on the day's reading: <https://en.elijamission.net/proclaiming-the-gospel-with-wisdom-2/>

Meditation on the day's Gospel: <https://en.elijamission.net/remaining-in-the-word/>