

20. May 2025

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

“The first Gentiles embrace the faith and are baptised”

Acts 10: 23b-29

The next day he (Peter) rose and went off with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his kinsmen and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am a man.” And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered; and he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit any one of another nation; but God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.”

Through a vision in which Peter was exhorted to sacrifice and eat animals that were considered impure in Judaism, the Lord had prepared him to go to the Gentiles, in other words to the non-Jews, as well. So Peter dared to enter the house of the centurion Cornelius, who was waiting for him with several people whom he had invited. When he arrived, Cornelius showed him great respect by bowing reverently at his feet. But Peter knew how to react and made it clear to him that he did not deserve such a gesture, for he was a man like any other. What made him special was the grace of God that was at work in him and to which he had responded with his whole life.

Only God deserves gestures like this from the centurion. In the Book of Revelation we find a similar passage:

‘When I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me; but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”’
(Rev 22:8-9).

Peter then listened to Cornelius' account of the angel who had appeared to him and commanded him to send for him. Now they had gathered to hear what Peter had to say to them from the Lord. Let us turn to the Acts of the Apostles to witness how Peter proclaimed the Gospel to that willing audience:

'Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses to all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and made him manifest; not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.' (Acts 10:34-43).

All who believe in Jesus will receive forgiveness of sins. Salvation in Christ, foretold by the prophets, must be proclaimed to all people.

Later, in his Letter to the Galatians, St. Paul will affirm: *'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.'* (Gal 3:28).

Peter understood this by the grace of God. There, in the house of Cornelius, his horizon broadened and he understood better the mission entrusted to him: *'Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him'*.

How important is this new understanding of the apostle! It opens the doors for all Gentiles to come to their Redeemer. Immediately afterwards, Peter experienced the

confirmation of the Holy Spirit and drew the right conclusion, as today's passage relates below:

'While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, "Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.' (Acts 10:44-48).

The essential step had been taken. But, as we shall see tomorrow, on his return to Jerusalem, Peter first had to justify it to the Jews who had embraced faith in Christ.

The other apostles and brethren would have to assimilate this new situation in the history of salvation: the doors to salvation had also been opened to the Gentiles.

Meditation on the day's reading: <https://en.elijamission.net/we-must-all-experience-many-hardships-before-we-enter-the-kingdom-of-god-2/>

Meditation on the day's Gospel: <https://en.elijamission.net/the-true-peace-of-christ-2/>