

21. May 2025

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

“The Good News begins to reach the Gentiles”

Acts 11:1-4

Now the apostles and the brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, “Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?” But Peter began and explained to them in order.

Peter was able to dispel the objections of the Judeo-Christians by telling them in detail what had happened. The apostles and the Judean brethren also had to understand that it was God's plan that the gospel should now reach the nations. Peter was able to recognise this because of the concrete indications the Lord had given him through the vision. It was also he who took this essential step in baptising Cornelius and the people who had listened to his preaching with him. Peter concluded his account of the events to the Christian community in Jerusalem with the following words:

“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?”

Peter was able to convince the brethren, and it is good to hear him say: ‘who was I that I could withstand God?’ He himself had allowed himself to be convinced and opened up to the Lord, and now he understood God's plans better. How essential this was and still is to this day! We must understand it again and again: we, as disciples, follow the Lord. It cannot be the other way around, pretending to put limits on God with our own thoughts and ideas.

It is the Holy Spirit who has the overview and passes it on to us according to our ability to grasp it. And it is He Himself who moves us to put into practice what we

have understood. This applies both to our inner journey with the Lord and to our service in evangelisation. The Paraclete is the key to a fruitful mission. The fewer obstacles we place in His way, the easier we make it for Him.

After Peter's account, the initial scepticism of the Jerusalem Church turned to joy and praise to the Lord: *"Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life."* Now they recognised God's grace and He could include them in His plan of salvation.

Due to the persecution that followed the martyrdom of Stephen and the consequent scattering of the faithful, the word of the Lord had spread even further. The Acts of the Apostles tells us the following:

"Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to none except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Greek also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number that believed turned to the Lord. News of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad; and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose; for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a large company was added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church, and taught a large company of people; and in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians."

Access to the Gentiles was widely opened. Although at first the preachers of the gospel focused mainly on Jews, even outside the borders of Israel, some began to preach the good news to Greeks as well. The Gospel was well received in Antioch (today's Antakya in Turkey). So the Greeks were among the first to whom the Gospel was proclaimed, and we hear that *'a great number that believed turned to the Lord.'*

For this reason, the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to give solid instruction to the new converts. As we see, the apostles did not consider this instruction irrelevant. In fact, it is very important that people who are new in the faith receive support from those who are already more firmly established in the faith, because they need to be

strengthened in the faith they have just embraced. Temptations will come and they must learn to reject them through clear doctrine and a consistent lifestyle.

Today it is no less important than then to remain faithful to the doctrine we have received from God and the Church. This does not only concern the neo-converts, but also those who have been on the path of faith for a long time need to renew and deepen it again and again in order to be able to resist all kinds of confusion. If we do not do so, it may happen that, as time goes by, our thinking becomes more and more confused and, as a result, we end up being sowers of confusion rather than of light.

Thanks to Barnabas' presence in Antioch, many more people embraced the faith. So Barnabas brought Saul to help him and together they taught the new Christian community for a whole year.

There, in Antioch, the disciples were called Christians for the first time.

Meditation on the day's reading: <https://en.elijamission.net/clarity-in-doctrine-clarity-in-the-way/>

Meditation on the day's Gospel: <https://en.elijamission.net/purification-processes-3/>