

25 May 2025

## ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

### “Paul in Iconium and Lystra”

Acts 14:8-20

*Now at Lystra there was a man sitting, who could not use his feet; he was a cripple from birth, who had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking; and Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he sprang up and walked. And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, because he was the chief speaker, they called Hermes. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the people. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out among the multitude, crying, “Men, why are you doing this? We also are men, of like nature with you, and bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways; yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” With these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them. But Jews came there from Antioch and Iconium; and having persuaded the people, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city; and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.*

Before arriving in Lystra, the apostles had suffered persecution once again. They had been in Iconium, where they were able to preach for quite some time in the synagogue and produced abundant fruit (Acts 14:1-7). Miracles and wonders were performed through their hands, and a large crowd of Greeks and Jews believed. However, the unbelievers, both Jews and Greeks, joined forces with their leaders against the apostles, so they had to flee to Lystra and Derbe, cities in Lycaonia, and the surrounding area.

The healing of a cripple in Lystra caused great confusion among the pagans of that city. Still clinging to their pagan beliefs, they regarded the apostles as gods in human form, and a priest of Zeus was already preparing to offer them a sacrifice according to their customs. The apostles barely managed to prevent this, and Paul began to preach to them. The difference between this speech in Lystra and the way he usually announced the Good News to the Jews is clearly evident. When addressing the latter, he can draw on the concrete history of God with His chosen people. When addressing the pagans, on the other hand, Paul alludes to God's work in nature.

Previously, God had allowed each nation to follow its own path. But now, with the coming of Jesus, all must convert from 'false things' to the living God. Here Paul alludes to Scripture: *'For all the gods of the peoples are idols; but the Lord made the heavens. Honor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.'* (Ps 95:5).

In the Old Covenant, it was essential that Israel keep away from the gods and idols of the Gentiles, precisely because they are nothing but appearances. This means that they do not possess the power attributed to them by the pagans, who were still steeped in ignorance. Added to this is the fact that demons used these 'appearances' to deceive men.

Even today, it is important to stay away from idols and false gods of all kinds. Under the pretext of inculturation, some people seek to include customs and rituals of various peoples in the celebration of the Eucharist. However, we must warn against this tendency. If we do not act with good discernment of spirits, it can easily happen that in the worship of the living God, other inappropriate ritual acts and other divinities are adopted, which are nothing but appearances and behind which demons can hide to contaminate the liturgical service.

A shocking example of idolatry in our Church took place publicly on 4 October 2019 in the Vatican Gardens and St. Peter's Basilica, where a figure of Pachamama was venerated. To this day, repentance and reparation for this act are still pending.

As for the apostles, they were once again prevented from continuing their ministry in Lystra, as the unbelieving Jews would not give them respite. They came from Antioch and Iconium to persecute the apostles. In Lystra, they stirred up the crowd against the apostles and stoned Paul.

It is alarming to see how easily people allow themselves to be seduced into doing evil. The inhabitants of Lystra had just witnessed the healing of a cripple who had never walked. They had just heard the words of St. Paul, who wanted to lead them to faith in the living God. However, under the influence of the hostile Jews, they were soon ready to cruelly stone the apostle. This reminds us of what happened to Our Lord: on Palm Sunday, He was welcomed in Jerusalem by the people of Israel as their king amid cries of 'Hosanna,' and a few days later, undoubtedly incited by their leaders, the same crowd shouted, 'Crucify Him!'

However, Paul did not die stoned and was able to continue his missionary journey with Barnabas.