

## Life in The Early Church: The Acts of the Apostles

. **St. Luke's Introduction (Lk 1:4)** : Reminds believers of Jesus' instructions to "not depart from Jerusalem but to wait (there) for the Promise of the Father (The Holy Spirit).

**Point of Reflection:** How do we learn to become more obedient to the Lord? How do we cultivate the virtue of Mary in our lives?

. **The Ascension of Jesus (Lk 1:6-12):** As Jesus is lifted up to Heaven, He tells His disciples to be His witnesses. The angels at the Ascension also teach us that Jesus will return again at the end of time.

**Point of Reflection:** At the Ascension, Jesus told the disciples that they would receive "power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." This power would enable them to carry out their ministry. Without it, they would remain powerless. How often do we ask for the power of the Holy Spirit to be at work in our lives?

. **The Upper Room (Lk 1:13-14):** The Eleven prayed with Jesus and Mary as they awaited the Promise of The Father. Their prayer together made them "one" with each other and God.

**Point of Reflection:** Mary prayed with the disciples, waiting with them for the promise of Jesus (Pentecost) to be fulfilled. She encouraged them, inviting them to greater trust in the Lord. How can our reflection upon the life and virtues of Mary help us to grow in hope, patience and stronger faith? How is trusting Jesus taking Him at His word?

. **Choice of Judas' Successor (Lk 1:15-26):** The Eleven were inspired to become whole again after the departure and death of Judas. They realized they were incomplete and needed the full number of those chosen to complete their mission. This is why, led by the Holy Spirit, they drew lots for Judas' replacement.

**Point of Reflection:** The Apostles trusted that God was guiding them and the formation of the Church. This is why when Judas died they turned to God and asked Him to provide a replacement so that their number would be full and complete again. God has a plan for the Church and each of us individually. Are we aware of God's plan for us as part of the Body of Christ?

. **Pentecost** (Lk 2:1-13): Pentecost confirms that God is a Father who keeps His promises. As much as Pentecost was about the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Church it is about God's trustworthiness. What He says He will do He does.

**Point of Reflection:** Before Pentecost, the disciples had been instructed by Jesus to evangelize but they were unable to do so, trapped by their fears. After Pentecost, the disciples were filled with power and enabled to carry out the Lord's commands. How can the Holy Spirit empower us to overcome our limitations?

**The Life of The Early Church** (Lk 2:42-47): St. Luke says that the early Christians were "devoted" to community life and to one another. Central to this devotion was the "breaking of the bread," or Mass. St. Luke tells us that the common life of the early Christians was filled with "praising God" and the joy of seeing the Lord bring more people into the Church.

**Point of Reflection:** How does my devotion to Mary bring me to greater desire for the Eucharist? How are Mary and the Eucharist related?

**St. Peter's Cure of a Crippled Beggar** (Lk 3:1-10): While the beggar at The Beautiful Gate sought alms from Peter and John, these were not what he really needed. God gave him something more precious than silver and gold, a complete physical healing. St. Luke tells us that in response to this gift, the beggar "praised God."

**Point of Reflection:** The beggar wanted money but God gave him something more important, namely healing and faith. Sometimes we pray for certain things and do not receive them but we get from God something that we need rather than what we want. God's love and mercy responds to us perfectly.

**Peter's Testimony before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem** (Lk 4:5-22): In his speech, St. Peter declared that Jesus is "the stone rejected by you (the Jews), the builders, which has become the cornerstone." Jesus is the sure foundation and origin of all that we do in ministry.

**Point of Reflection:** Scripture tells us that Jesus is the "cornerstone" of the Church and our lives. It is a temptation to think that we alone are responsible for all the good in our lives. In truth, we are dependent on Jesus for everything good we have and for all of our abilities. How can we ground ourselves more deeply in Jesus?

**Ananias and Sapphira** (Acts 5: 5-11): A man and his wife entered the Church with dishonesty, concealing from St. Peter that they had hidden money and kept it from the community. The Holy Spirit revealed to St. Peter this dishonesty and Peter confronted the couple about it. In their fear and lies, they died, giving the young Church an example of how sin leads to death.

**Point of Reflection:** Discipleship challenges us to live in truth as Jesus is The Way, The Truth and The Life. Lying or deception has no place in the life of a Christian. Lies break relationships and destroy trust. How can the example of Mary lead us to live in greater honesty?

**The Apostle's Miraculous Release from Jail** (Acts 5: 17-42): The jealous high priest of Israel and the Sadducees had the Apostles arrested and put in jail for evangelizing. But "at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out." When they were free, the angel instructed the Apostles to continue the work of ministry. This led to them giving testimony to their opponents and others. It is in this passage that Gamaliel's advice to the authorities about the Church is recorded.

**Point of Reflection:** God's providence and will was stronger than the jealousy of the High Priest and Sadducees. The power of God's love is always stronger than the power of evil. How did Mary show, in her life, that she knew this?

**The Ordination of The First Deacons** (Lk 6:1-7): As the Church grew, the Apostles saw that they needed assistants so that ministry could be carried out successfully.

This is why they ordained the first deacons through prayer and the laying on of hands.

**Point of Reflection:** What is the vocation to which God has called you? How are you living it out with Mary as your example?

**The Stoning of Deacon Stephen** (Lk 7:54-60): One of the first deacons of the Church becomes the first martyr for the Faith.

**Point of Reflection:** How passionate are you for the Catholic Faith? How does that passion guide and shape your life?

**Persecution of The Church** (Lk 8:1-8): After Deacon Stephen's martyrdom, enemies of the Church initiated a persecution, Yet, St, Luke is clear that this persecution served God's purposes in that it scattered believers to new areas that had not yet heard of the Gospel. This led these believers to evangelize and bring new members into the Church.

**Point of Reflection:** How do seemingly negative circumstances sometimes lead to good being carried out? How can God use them to accomplish His will?

**Philip and The Ethiopian Official** (Lk 8:26-40): Philip allowed himself to be used as an instrument of the Holy Spirit. In his surrender of his will to God, God was able to bring a new believer to Christ which later would lead to a whole nation being brought to Christ. To this day, Ethiopian Christians credit Philip's baptism of the Ethiopian Official with bringing Christianity to their county.

**Point of Reflection:** The conversion of one man led to a whole country eventually being converted. In our reflection on our lives, can we see how God's work often begins in a small way but leads to something bigger?

**The Conversion of Saul** (Lk 9:1-19): Saul of Tarsus was a zealous Pharisee, convinced that it was God's will to destroy the Church. He was responsible for the deaths of many Christians before God showed Him that he was wrong. In a flash of blinding light, Christ, the Light of The World, illumined the darkness in Saul's heart by revealing Himself as God. Then, God set in motion His plan for Saul which

involved other believers being used as instruments of grace. Saul was so profoundly changed that he received a new name, Paul.

**Point of Reflection:** Saul thought that he was doing the right thing by persecuting the Church but he wasn't. God sometimes enlightens us about the things that we do and this enlightenment comes through unexpected ways. How can we remain open to such formation from the Lord and be more responsive to it?

**St. Paul Restores Tabitha to Life (Lk 9:36-43):** St. Luke describes Tabitha as being a woman "completely occupied with good deeds and almsgiving." He also tells us she was an exceptional seamstress. Her death, which appeared final, was in fact not. God's plan was that He restore this good woman to life after she became unexpectedly sick. Tabitha's restoration to life was the reason why many "came to believe in the Lord."

**Point of Reflection:** We live in a world in which there is less and less faith. Death is seen as final and often, today, completely disconnected from any belief in the afterlife. How can our faith in Jesus and in His Resurrection help us remain hopeful in the face of our society's faithlessness? How can we encourage those with little or no faith to come to faith in Jesus and eternal life?

**The Visions of Cornelius and Peter (Lk 10:1-33):** In order to guide and direct the Church, God granted Cornelius and Peter special graces. They experienced visits with angels and were given instructions through visions. Both men heeded God's message which they received and so were part of a greater plan of salvation which God was unfolding at that moment. We now benefit from this plan and are part of it.

**Point of Reflection:** In the Hail Mary we often say that she was "full of grace." This refers to her Immaculate Conception and that she was completely free from personal and original sin. How can our prayerful reflection upon Mary's life lead us to welcome all the grace God has in store for us?

**Peter's Miraculous Release from Prison (Lk 12:1-19):** After being imprisoned by King Herod, Peter was released from prison miraculously. St. Luke attributes this miraculous escape to the prayer of God's people. He states "prayer by the Church

was fervently being made to God on his behalf.” While Peter faced perhaps one of the most difficult and frightening moments of his life, intercessory prayer by his friends was making the difference and overcoming the evil Peter was facing.

**Point of Reflection:** How can we grow more to believe in the power of prayer?

**The First Ecumenical Council of The Church in Jerusalem (Lk 15:1-41):** At this first council, the Church established some disciplinary rules for all Christians including not requiring Gentile Christians to adhere to Jewish dietary laws, to avoid food sacrificed to idols and to avoid the sins of unchastity.

**Point of Reflection:** How can the Church’s discipline of fasting and abstinence lead us to a deeper faith? How does adhering to these disciplines unite us more closely to Christ and Mary?

**Paul and Silas’ Trip through Macedonia (Lk 16:6-10):** After his conversion, Paul became the greatest writer in the New Testament and undertook many heroic missionary journeys. These sojourns were guided directly by the Lord, as St. Luke indicates. As Paul and Silas traveled together, Paul slept one night and had a dream of a Macedonian man asking for help. Paul then changed course and traveled to this place to bring the Gospel.

**Point of Reflection:** Mary is The Spouse of The Holy Spirit. Her life was guided and directed by the Holy Spirit’s promptings. How can our prayer with Mary make us more sensitive in discerning the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives?

**Paul and the Slave Girl (Lk 16:16-24):** As Jesus proclaimed the Good News of the Kingdom of God, so He commissioned His disciples to do the same. Jesus’ Kingdom was set against the kingdom of evil and through His miracles, Jesus showed that the Kingdom of God was stronger than the kingdom of evil. Paul combatted evil during his ministry in the form of people possessed by demons. The slave girl who told fortunes is one example Paul encountered. Ironically, as Paul lovingly freed this woman from evil, he lost his freedom to a physical prison because the owners of the slave were angry that their profits were lost.

**Point of Reflection:** Why are many people today tempted to embrace occult practices like fortunetelling? It is because the occult tempts them to believe that through these practices they will have greater control over their lives and have power. Yet, this passage from the Acts shows us that the occult enslaves those who practice it. How can I grow in my discernment so that I do not engage in any such practice?

**Apollos (Lk 18:24-28):** St. Luke tells us that Apollos was an Egyptian Jewish disciple who “was an authority on the Scriptures.” This knowledge made Apollos bold in proclaiming the Gospel and refuting enemies of the Church. St. Luke says Apollos “vigorously refuted the Jews in public, establishing from the Scriptures that Messiah is Jesus.”

**Point of Reflection:** We grow in confidence when we have knowledge and experience in a certain area. This confidence leads us to become “bold” in our actions. How can we grow in confidence in our faith?

**Paul and The Shipwreck (Lk 27: 1-44):** When Paul was arrested and hurt by his enemies he asked for a trial before the Roman emperor because he was a Roman citizen. Paul’s enemies were forced to concede and release him so he could depart for Rome. Yet, on his way, the ship he was on wrecked. St. Luke tells us that the Lord showed Paul that this would happen beforehand and while enduring the storm that wrecked the ship, Paul encouraged his fellow passengers. Later, as the group landed on Malta (Luke 28:1-10), the Lord healed sick people on the island through Paul.

**Point of Reflection:** St. Paul endured great sufferings while on his missionary journeys. Yet, he also had great faith and confidence in God’s love for him. How can these two realities coexist? These realities coexisted in the life of Jesus Himself who was the Beloved Son of God but endured the Cross.