



ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

During the three years of public life, Jesus set down the foundations of the Church: he gathered his first disciples and associated them with his mission (Mk 3:13-16). He put Peter in charge of the community (Mt 16:18) and made him the guardian of the faith (Lk 22:31) within the new People of God. He made the Twelve apostles and the disciples a community of witnesses (Jn 15:16) and promised them the gift of the Spirit who would help them come to know the fullness of the Light which Jesus came to bring into the world (Jn 16:13).

Now, the Lord is risen, and from the pierced side of Jesus, a new people, a new world is born, like the child coming to life in the blood and water flowing from its mother's womb (Jn 19:34). This Gospel community, enlightened by the word of Jesus, enlivened by his Spirit, sets out to announce God's marvelous deeds to the ends of the earth and to gather together in unity, the scattered children of God (Jn 11:52).

Two great giants stand out in this evangelization: Peter and Paul. Peter

will devote himself in particular to the evangelization of the Jews, while Paul will become the apostle to the Gentiles (Gal 2:7-8).

Luke, the author of the third Gospel, writes about this nascent Church in the Book of Acts of the Apostles, which was probably first called Acts of Apostles. If, as in the case of the Gospels, earlier accounts of the Acts existed which Luke would have drawn upon to write his text, the harmony achieved in editing these various texts is indeed remarkable since it is very difficult to identify these different texts today.

Certain scholars believe that at the outset the Acts of the Apostles and the third Gospel were one and the same text that was only divided up later. One point is certain, however: by the beginning of the second century, the Acts of the Apostles was already a separate text. However, the testimony concerning the beginnings of the Church has come down to us in two different forms: the "current text," coinciding with the majority of ancient manuscripts of Syrian and Egyptian origin, and the said "Western text," which is longer and where the disputes between the Jews and the first Christians are more in evidence.

The Book of Acts does not follow a rigorous outline. One can, however, pick out some clear-cut divisions in the text which allow us to glimpse Luke's project. Without focusing exclusively on Peter and Paul, Luke devoted the greater part of his work to them. In spite of many exceptions, Peter dominates the first twelve chapters, while Paul dominates the second part of the book.

From the geographical point of view, one can notice that the Acts bring us from Jerusalem, through Judea and Samaria, to Rome, thus following the mission to which Jesus appointed his apostles on ascension day (Acts 1:8). In the first seven chapters we are in Jerusalem, then in Chapter 8 and those following, we see—of course, with some exceptions—the Church taking root in Judea, in Samaria, and along the coastal plain; from Chapter 13 onward, we accompany Paul to Asia Minor and to Greece and finally, in Chapter 28, to Rome, to the Palace of the Emperor, that is to say, to the heart of the pagan world.

There, the Book of Acts ends abruptly, as if Luke, like the runner whose job is to carry the Good News of salvation as it is spreading out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, has achieved his goal and thus fulfilled his contract. This in itself is sufficient to remind us that the Acts, no more than the Gospels, do not pretend to be a biography of Peter

and Paul, or a detailed history of the early Church, but a testimony to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, the Holy Spirit is the veritable actor in the birth of the Church: this is the reason why many commentators, ever since the first Christian centuries, have not hesitated to call this book “The Gospel of the Holy Spirit.” With only slight modification we could use here the words of John in Jn 20:30: “The Spirit has accomplished many other signs which have not been written of in this book. These have been recorded so that you may believe that the Spirit is at work in the Church of Jesus Christ.”

Luke’s intention in the Acts is to highlight, in particular through the diverse preaching of Peter and Paul, how the mystery of Christ and of the Church has been announced and prepared for in the Old Testament, but also how this double mystery—Christ and the Church—fulfills the Old Testament.

In this perspective, Luke readily highlights the parallels between Jesus and his Church, and also between the people of the Old Testament and the Church: by way of example, let us mention the parallels between the death of Stephen and that of Christ, between the journey to Jerusalem of Paul and that of Christ, but also the opposition between the Tower of Babel and Pentecost.

Continuing in this same line of inquiry, *Jerusalem* constantly flows from the pen of Luke (58 times). As he has done in his Gospel, where the Holy City is mentioned 30 times, Luke points to Jerusalem as the place where salvation is accomplished and from where the Good News is to be taken to all nations.

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Jesus taken up to heaven

1¹In the first part of my work, Theophilus, I wrote of all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ²until the day when he ascended to heaven.

But first, he had instructed, through the Holy Spirit the apostles he had chosen. ³After his passion, he presented himself to them, giving many signs that he was alive; over a period of forty days he appeared to them and taught them concerning the kingdom of God. ⁴Once, when he had been eating with them, he told them, “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the fulfillment of the Father’s promise about which I have spoken to you: ⁵John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit within a few days.”

⁶When they had come together, they asked him, “Is it now that you will restore the kingdom of Israel?” ⁷And he answered, “It is not for you to know the time and the steps that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the earth.”

⁹After Jesus said this, he was taken up before their eyes and a cloud hid him from their sight. ¹⁰While they were still looking up to heaven, where he went, suddenly, two men dressed in white stood beside them ¹¹and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up at the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will return in the same way as you have seen him go there.”

ACTS 1:1-11

Read: Acts is a second volume, a continuation written by the author of the Gospel of Luke. The intended recipient is

“Theophilus,” a name based on two Greek words, *theos* (God) and *philos* (love). For forty days, Jesus appeared to his followers before ascending to heaven. The mission of proclaiming the gospel continues after Jesus’ ascension.

Reflect: When Jesus ascends into heaven he leaves a mission to each of his followers, everyone knows his Good News. How do you follow that mission? Are you encouraged to talk about Jesus with others?

Pray: Pray for courage to face the difficulties of the mission received. Also, pray for the willingness to deal with future uncertainties. Thank for the gift of the Holy Spirit who is always with us.

Act: Make a plan detailing how things should be amended for you to be a true disciple and missionary of Jesus Christ. Rely on the power of the Spirit and follow that plan.

The disciples await the Holy Spirit

¹²Then they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount called Olives, which is a fifteen-minute walk away. ¹³On entering the city they went to the room upstairs where they were staying. Present there were Peter, John, James, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James, son of Alpheus; Simon the Zealot and Judas son of James. ¹⁴They all met together and were constantly united in prayer. With them were some women, and also Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

Matthias elected

¹⁵It was during this time that Peter stood up in the midst of the community—about one hundred and twenty in all—¹⁶and he said,

“Brothers, it was necessary that the Scriptures referring to Judas be fulfilled. The Holy Spirit had spoken through David about the one who would lead the crowd coming to arrest Jesus. ¹⁷He was one of our number and had been called to share our common ministry.

¹⁸(We know that he bought a field with the reward of his sin; yet, he threw himself headlong to his death; his body burst open and all his bowels spilled out. ¹⁹This event became known to all the people living in

Jerusalem and they named that field *Akeldama* in their own language, which means Field of Blood).

²⁰In the Book of Psalms it is written: *Let his house become deserted and may no one live in it.* But it is also written: *May another take his office.* ²¹Therefore, we must choose someone from among those who were with us during all the time that the Lord Jesus moved about with us, ²²beginning with John's baptism until the day when Jesus was taken away from us. One of these has to become with us a witness to his resurrection."

²³Then they proposed two: Joseph, called Barsabbas, also known as Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴They prayed: "You know, Lord, what is in the hearts of all. Show us, therefore, which of the two you have chosen ²⁵to replace Judas in this apostolic ministry which he deserted to go to the place he deserved."

²⁶Then they drew lots between the two and the choice fell on Matthias who was added to the eleven apostles.

ACTS 1:12-26

Read: The disciples remain united in prayer. Peter explains that because of the death of Judas, and as announced in the Scripture, it is necessary to replace him in the group of the apostles. After discernment, prayer and drawing lots, the apostles chose Matthias.

Reflect: See if your prayer is in communion with the Church and her community. When you pray, with whom do you feel intimately connected? Do you rely on the light of the Spirit when you need to make important decisions?

Pray: Pray in a way that prayer unites you with God and your neighbor. Rely on the help of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Act: Renew your commitment to pray every day and be a disciple and missionary of Jesus Christ. Like St. Therese, transform your works and daily prayers into a missionary act.

The coming of the Holy Spirit

2¹When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly, out of the sky, came a sound like a strong

rushing wind; and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. There appeared³ tongues as if of fire, which parted and came to rest upon each one of them. ⁴All were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

⁵Staying in Jerusalem were religious Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered all excited, because each heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷Full of amazement and wonder, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸How is it that we hear them in our own native language? ⁹Here are Parthians, Medes and Elamites; and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia; Pontus and Asia; ¹⁰Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt; and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene; and visitors from Rome; ¹¹both Jews and foreigners who accept Jewish beliefs, Cretans and Arabians; and all of us hear them proclaiming in our own language what God the Savior does.”

¹²They were amazed and greatly confused, and they kept asking one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³But others laughed and said, “These people are drunk.”

ACTS 2:1-13

Read: The promised Holy Spirit descends upon the disciples in a dramatic way during the feast of Pentecost. Bold deeds result. From that moment, they openly announce the Good News, which is welcomed by many people.

Reflect: Are you a courageous witness of the Good News of Jesus Christ, like Peter and the other apostles after Pentecost? Have you ever felt the power of the Holy Spirit in your life? How do you announce the Good News?

Pray: Allow yourself to be carried away by the Holy Spirit when it breaks into your life. Cowardice is not a reason to stop you from doing your mission. Thank Jesus Christ for being one of his disciples.

Act: Write down everything important that God has done in your life and share it with others.

Peter addresses the crowd

¹⁴Then Peter stood up with the Eleven and, with a loud voice, addressed them, “Fellow Jews and all foreigners now staying in Jerusalem, listen to what I have to say. ¹⁵These people are not drunk as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. ¹⁶Indeed what the prophet Joel spoke about has happened:

¹⁷In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on every mortal. Your sons and daughters will speak through the Holy Spirit; your young men will see visions and your old men will have dreams.

¹⁸In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on my servants, both men and women, and they will be prophets.

¹⁹I will perform miracles in the sky above and wonders on the earth below. ²⁰The sun will be darkened and the moon will turn red as blood before the great and glorious Day of the Lord comes.

²¹And then whoever calls upon the Name of the Lord will be saved.

²²Fellow Israelites, listen to what I am going to tell you about Jesus of Nazareth. God accredited him and through him did powerful deeds and wonders and signs in your midst, as you well know. ²³You delivered him to sinners to be crucified and killed, and in this way, the purpose of God from all times was fulfilled. ²⁴But God raised him to life and released him from the pain of death; because it was impossible for him to be held in the power of death. ²⁵David spoke of him when he said: *I saw the Lord before me at all times; he is by my side, that I may not be shaken.* ²⁶Therefore, my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced; my body, too, will live in hope. ²⁷Because you will not forsake me in the abode of the dead, nor allow your Holy One to experience corruption. ²⁸You have made known to me the paths of life, and your presence will fill me with joy.

²⁹Friends, I don’t need to prove that the patriarch David died and was buried; his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰But he knew that God had sworn to him, that one of his descendants would sit upon his throne and, ³¹as he was a prophet, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah. So he said that *he would not be left in the region of the dead, nor would his body experience corruption.*

³²This Messiah is Jesus, and we are all witnesses that God raised him to life. ³³He has been exalted at God’s right side and the Father has entrusted the Holy Spirit to him; this Spirit he has just poured upon us, as you now see and hear.

³⁴And look: David did not ascend into heaven, but he himself said: *The Lord said to my Lord: sit at my right side,* ³⁵*until I make your enemies a stool for your feet.* ³⁶Let Israel, then know for sure that God has made Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

³⁷When they heard this, they were deeply troubled. And they asked Peter and the other apostles, “What shall we do, brothers?”

³⁸Peter answered: “Each of you must repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven. Then, you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹For the promise of God was made to you and your children and to all those from afar, whom our God may call.”

⁴⁰With many other words Peter gave the message; and appealed to them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” ⁴¹So those who accepted his word were baptized; some three thousand persons were added to their number that day.

ACTS 2:14-41

Read: Peter delivers a speech in which the Pentecost event is explained as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel. Convincing proof that Jesus is indeed the Messiah results in the conversion of about three thousand people.

Reflect: Are you prepared to give reasons for your faith, as Peter did? Is your way of life encouraging others to believe in Jesus Christ?

Pray: Pray that your life testimony helps those who are confused and wander from religion to religion. May they find Jesus Christ in the Church. Pray for the missionaries who are persecuted for proclaiming the Gospel.

Act: Perform actions that give testimony to your faith in Jesus Christ. To the extent of your capability, be in solidarity with the missionary works.

The first community

⁴²They were faithful to the teaching of the apostles, the common life of sharing, the breaking of bread and the prayers.

⁴³A holy fear came upon all the people, for many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴Now, all the believers lived

together and shared all their belongings. ⁴⁵They would sell their property and all they had and distribute the proceeds to others, according to their need. ⁴⁶Each day they met together in the temple area; they broke bread in their homes; they shared their food with great joy and simplicity of heart; ⁴⁷they praised God and won the people's favor. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

ACTS 2:42-47

Read: An ideal Christian community life is summarized and presented: to learn who Jesus Christ is; to help one another; and, to pray and celebrate the Eucharist together.

Reflect: Do you regularly attend the Holy Eucharist to hear the Word? Do you participate in the Eucharist and pray in your parish? Do you share your goods with those who have less than you?

Pray: Pray for those who suffer due to lack of education, hunger, abandonment, and loneliness. Pray also for those who do not know Jesus Christ. Ask the Spirit to help you not to be indifferent to these problems.

Act: Participate in any volunteer activity in your community. Commit as a catechist in the parish or in some bible study or prayer group. Share your bread with a neighbor in need.

Peter and John cure a lame man

3¹Once when Peter and John were going up to the temple at three in the afternoon, the hour for prayer, ²a man crippled from birth was being carried in. Every day they would bring him and put him at the temple gate called "Beautiful;" there, he begged from those who entered the temple.

³When he saw Peter and John on their way into the temple, he asked for alms. ⁴Then Peter, with John at his side, looked straight at him and said, "Look at us." ⁵So he looked at them, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶But Peter said, "I have neither silver nor gold, but what I have I give you: In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, walk!"

⁷Then, he took the beggar by his right hand and helped him up. At

once his feet and ankles became firm ⁸and jumping up, he stood on his feet and began to walk. And he went with them into the temple, walking and leaping and praising God.

⁹All the people saw him walking and praising God; ¹⁰they recognized him as the one who used to sit begging at the Beautiful Gate of the temple and they were all astonished and amazed at what had happened to him.

ACTS 3:1-10

Read: Peter and John heal a beggar who has asked for alms by invoking the name of Jesus.

Reflect: There are sick or disabled people around us. How can we help them? Should we all, including the government, be more supportive of them? How do you share with others the gift of faith?

Pray: Pray that we all be more sympathetic to those who cannot help themselves. Ask for inspiration to discover how and with whom you can collaborate.

Act: Consider taking time to help an organization that works with people with disabilities. Check with your community.

¹¹While he clung to Peter and John, all the people struck with astonishment, came running to them in Solomon's Porch as it was called.

¹²When Peter saw the people, he said to them,

"Fellow Israelites, why are you amazed at this? Why do you stare at us, as if it was by some power or holiness of our own that we made this man walk? ¹³The God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over to death and denied before Pilate, when even Pilate had decided to release him. ¹⁴You rejected the Holy and Just One and you insisted that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵You killed the Master of life, but God raised him from the dead and we are witnesses to this. ¹⁶It is his Name, and faith in his Name, that has healed this man whom you see and recognize. The faith that comes through Jesus has given him wholeness in the presence of all of you.

¹⁷Yet, I know that you acted out of ignorance as did your leaders.

¹⁸God has fulfilled, in this way, what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer.

¹⁹Repent, then, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out; ²⁰and the time of refreshment may come by the mercy of God, when he sends the Messiah appointed for you, Jesus. ²¹For he must remain in heaven until the time of the universal restoration, which God spoke of long ago, through his holy prophets.

²²Moses foretold this when he said: *The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet, like me, from among your own people; you shall listen to him in all that he says to you.* ²³Whoever does not listen to that prophet is to be cut off from among his people.

²⁴In fact, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel onward, have announced the events of these days. ²⁵You are the children of the prophets and heirs of the Covenant that God gave to your ancestors when he said to Abraham: *All the families of the earth will be blessed through your descendant.* ²⁶It is to you, first, that God sends his Servant; he raised him to life to bless you, by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”

ACTS 3:11-26

Read: Peter explains that it is Jesus Christ who acts through him. Jesus Christ is the Messiah and Lord whom we accept.

Reflect: Is it important for you to believe in Jesus Christ and his works? How can you share with your people your faith in the Risen Lord?

Pray: Ask God to help you continue to grow in faith and to be a courageous witness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Messiah and Lord.

Act: Ask in your parish or community where and how to deepen your faith in Jesus Christ.

Peter and John are arrested

4¹While Peter and John were still speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them. ²They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming that resurrection from the dead had been

proved in the case of Jesus. ³Since it was already evening, they arrested them and put them in custody until the following day. ⁴But despite this, many of those who heard the Message, believed, and their number increased to about five thousand.

⁵The next day, the Jewish leaders, elders, and teachers of the law assembled in Jerusalem. ⁶Annas, the High Priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and all who were of the high priestly class were there. ⁷They brought Peter and John before them; and began to question them, “How did you do this? Whose name did you use?”

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke up, “Leaders of the people! Elders! ⁹It is a fact that we are being examined today for a good deed done to a cripple. How was he healed? ¹⁰You and all the people of Israel must know that this man stands before you cured through the name of Jesus Christ, the Nazorean. You had him crucified. But God raised him from the dead. ¹¹Jesus is *the stone rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone*. ¹²There is no salvation in anyone else; for there is no other Name given to humankind all over the world, by which we may be saved.”

¹³They were astonished at the boldness of Peter and John, considering that they were uneducated and untrained men. They also recognized that they had been with Jesus, ¹⁴but, as the man who had been cured stood beside them, they could make no reply.

¹⁵So they ordered them to leave the council room while they consulted with one another. ¹⁶They asked, “What shall we do with these men? Everyone who lives in Jerusalem knows that a remarkable sign has been given through them and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷But to stop this from spreading any further among the people, let us warn them never again to speak to anyone in the name of Jesus.” ¹⁸So they called them back and charged them not to speak, or teach at all, in the name of Jesus.

¹⁹But Peter and John answered them, “Judge for yourselves, whether it is right in God’s eyes for us to obey you rather than God. ²⁰We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.” ²¹Then the council threatened them once more and let them go. They could find no way of punishing them because of the people who glorified God for what had happened; ²²for the man who had been miraculously healed was over forty years old.

ACTS 4:1-22

Read: Peter and John were arrested by the religious authorities, and were questioned: With what power or in whose name was the paralytic been healed? They respond that what happened is the work of the Risen Christ. This great news is well received by simple people.

Reflect: In what places or environment does the existence and power of Jesus Christ continue to be questioned? Under what circumstances do you feel embarrassed to express your faith? Why?

Pray: Pray for those who are persecuted for believing in the Risen Jesus Christ. Ask for strength to never betray your faith, even amid difficulties. Pray for the authorities of the Church to promote evangelization through the continuing formation of the people of God.

Act: Find ways to deepen your faith and share it with others. Be an apostle at home.

The prayer of the community

²³As soon as Peter and John were set free, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and elders had said to them.

²⁴When they heard it, they raised their voices as one and called upon God, “Sovereign Lord, maker of heaven and earth, of the sea and everything in them, ²⁵you have put these words in the mouth of David our father and your servant through the Holy Spirit: *Why did the pagan nations rage and the people conspire in folly?* ²⁶*The kings of the earth were aligned and the princes gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah.*

²⁷For indeed, in this very city, Herod, with Pontius Pilate and the pagans, together with the people of Israel, conspired against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸Thus, indeed, they brought about whatever your powerful will had decided from all time would happen. ²⁹But now, Lord, see their threats against us; and enable your servants to speak your word with all boldness. ³⁰Stretch out your hand to heal and to work signs and wonders through the name of Jesus, your holy servant.”

³¹When they had prayed, the place where they were gathered together shook; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God boldly.

An attempt to share everything

³²The whole community of believers was one in heart and mind. No one claimed private ownership of any possessions; but rather, they shared all things in common. ³³With great power, the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, for all of them were living in an exceptional time of grace.

ACTS 4:23-33

Read: The community thanks God that Peter and John have overcome the threats of the Sanhedrin. A second “Pentecost experience” occurs. The community of believers is described as being “of one heart and soul.”

Reflect: Do you recognize any gift of the Holy Spirit in your life? How is the Spirit working in your community? Do you know of a community of believers who “have one mind and one heart”?

Pray: Ask the Holy Spirit to pour out his gifts upon your community to bear witness to Jesus Christ. Pray that those who have more share with the hungry. Remember in prayer the neediest members of your community.

Act: Encourage members of your community to reflect on how best to give testimony of Jesus Christ. Empathize with those suffering from cold, hunger and loneliness, especially within your community.

³⁴There was no needy person among them, for those who owned land or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of the sale. ³⁵And they laid it at the feet of the apostles who distributed it according to each one’s need. ³⁶This is what a certain Joseph did. He was a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas, meaning: “The encouraging one.” ³⁷He sold a field, which he owned and handed the money to the apostles.

The fraud of Ananias and Sapphira

5¹ Another man, named Ananias, in agreement with his wife Sapphira, likewise sold a piece of land; ² with his wife's knowledge he put aside some of the proceeds and the rest he turned over to the apostles.

³ Then, Peter said to him, "Ananias, how is it that you let Satan fill your heart; and why do you intend to deceive the Holy Spirit by keeping some of the proceeds of your land for yourself? ⁴ Who obliged you to sell it? And, after it was sold, could you not have kept all the money? How could you think of such a thing? You have not deceived us but God."

⁵ Upon hearing these words, Ananias fell down and died. Great fear came upon all who heard of it; ⁶ the young men stood up, wrapped his body and carried it out for burial.

⁷ About three hours later, Ananias's wife came, but she was not aware of what had happened. ⁸ Peter challenged her, "Tell me whether you sold that piece of land for this price?" She said, "Yes, that was the price." ⁹ Peter replied, "How could you two agree to put the Holy Spirit to the test? Those who buried your husband are at the door and they will carry you out as well."

¹⁰ With that, she fell dead at his feet. The young men came in, found her dead and carried her out for burial beside her husband. ¹¹ And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of it.

¹² Many miraculous signs and wonders were done among the people through the hands of the apostles. The believers, of one accord, used to meet in Solomon's Porch. ¹³ None of the others dared to join them, but the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴ So, an ever-increasing number of men and women believed in the Lord. ¹⁵ The people carried the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and on mats, so that, when Peter passed by, at least his shadow might fall on some of them. ¹⁶ The people gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those who were troubled by unclean spirits; and all of them were healed.

ACTS 4:34—5:16

Read: The generosity of Joseph/Barnabas is contrasted with the plot of Ananias and Sapphira to deceive and attempt to undermine the sense of unity in the community.

Reflect: Are you a person detached from material goods? Are

you tempted to hold on to things rather than sharing them to benefit your community?

Pray: Pray to God to give you the grace to be generous and supportive to others, especially those most in need in your community.

Action: Following the example of Barnabas, consider making an additional donation to your local church community, to a children's home, a home for the elderly or any other place in need.

The apostles arrested again

¹⁷The High Priest and all his supporters, that is the party of the Sadducees, became very jealous of the apostles; ¹⁸so they arrested them and had them thrown into the public jail. ¹⁹But an angel of the Lord opened the door of the prison during the night, brought them out, and said to them, ²⁰“Go and stand in the temple court and tell the people the whole of this living message.” ²¹Accordingly, they entered the temple at dawn and resumed their teaching.

When the High Priest and his supporters arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin that is the full Council of the elders of Israel. They sent word to the jail to have the prisoners brought in. ²²But when the temple guards arrived at the jail, they did not find them inside; so they returned with the news, ²³“We found the prison securely locked and the prison guards at their post outside the gate; but when we opened the gate, we found no one inside.”

²⁴Upon hearing these words, the captain of the temple guard and the high priests were baffled, wondering where all of this would end. ²⁵Just then, someone arrived with the report, “Look, those men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple, teaching the people.” ²⁶Then the captain went off with the guards and brought them back, but without any show of force for fear of being stoned by the people.

²⁷So they brought them in and made them stand before the Council, and the High Priest questioned them, ²⁸“We gave you strict orders not to preach such a Savior but you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching; and you intend charging us with the killing of this man.” ²⁹To this, Peter and the apostles replied, “Better for us to obey God, rather than any human authority!

³⁰The God of our ancestors raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a wooden post. ³¹God set him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to grant repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. ³²We are witnesses to all these things, as well as the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

³³When the Council heard this, they became very angry and wanted to kill them. ³⁴But one of them, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law highly respected by the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin. He ordered the men to be taken outside for a few minutes ³⁵and then he spoke to the assembly.

“Fellow Israelites, consider well what you intend to do to these men. ³⁶For some time ago, Theudas came forward claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men joined him. But he was killed and all his followers were dispersed or disappeared. ³⁷After him, Judas the Galilean appeared at the time of the census and persuaded many people to follow him. But he, too, perished; and his whole following was scattered. ³⁸So, in this present case, I advise you to have nothing to do with these men. Leave them alone. If their project or activity is of human origin, it will destroy itself. ³⁹If, on the other hand, it is from God, you will not be able to destroy it; and you might indeed find yourselves fighting against God.”

The Council let themselves be persuaded. ⁴⁰They called in the apostles and had them whipped; and ordered them not to speak again of Jesus, the Savior. Then they set them free.

⁴¹The apostles went out from the Council, rejoicing that they were considered worthy to suffer disgrace for the sake of the Name. ⁴²Day after day, both in the temple and in people’s homes, they continued to teach and to proclaim that Jesus was the Messiah.

ACTS 5:17-42

Read: God protects the apostles to continue preaching the Gospel. Gamaliel, a Pharisee and a distinguished scholar of the law, advises the council not to persecute the Christian movement: if it is of human origin it will destroy itself, if it is from God, it cannot be destroyed.

Reflect: Gamaliel requests patience to discern the mysterious actions of God in life: How to obey God rather than people

without falling into provocation or even in disobedience? How to know that a personal position is from God and not stubbornness?

Pray: Pray for wisdom and a deeper understanding of God's plan for your life and that of your community.

Act: Offer the practical words of Gamaliel's advice to a person who is troubled about some type of religious controversy.

The choosing of assistants

6¹In those days, as the number of disciples grew, the so-called *Hellenists* complained against the so-called *Hebrews*, because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ²So the Twelve summoned the whole body of disciples together, and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God to serve at tables. ³So, friends, choose from among yourselves seven respected men, full of Spirit and wisdom, that we may appoint them to this task. ⁴As for us, we shall give ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

⁵The whole community agreed; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit; Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenus and Nicolaus of Antioch, who was a proselyte. ⁶They presented these men to the apostles, who first prayed over them and then laid hands upon them.

⁷The word of God continued to spread, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly, and even many priests accepted the faith.

ACTS 6:1-7

Read: The community is faced with a practical problem and found a solution. They elect the first seven deacons, including Stephen, who will be the first martyr.

Reflect: Do you know how to give practical solutions to family or community problems? Do you consider yourself a positive person or are you putting obstacles to good works?

Pray: The elect were "endowed with the Spirit and wisdom." Pray that people with these gifts arise in our communities.

Act: Respond actively to the power of the Spirit in your life. Lead or participate in your neighborhood in an initiative that benefits the community.

The story of Stephen

⁸Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. ⁹Some persons, then came forward, who belonged to the so-called Synagogue of Freedmen from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and Asia. ¹⁰They argued with Stephen. But they could not match the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke. ¹¹As they were unable to face the truth, they bribed some men to say, “We heard him speak against Moses and against God.”

¹²So they stirred up the people, the elders and the teachers of the law; they took him by surprise, seized him and brought him before the Council. ¹³Then they produced false witnesses who said, “This man never stops speaking against our Holy Place and the law. ¹⁴We even heard him say that Jesus, the Nazorean, will destroy our Holy Place and change the customs which Moses handed down to us.” ¹⁵And all who sat in the Council fixed their eyes on him, and his face appeared to them like the face of an angel.

7¹So the High Priest asked him: “Is it true?” He answered, “Brothers and fathers, listen to me.

²The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia before he went to live in Haran. And he said to him: ³‘Leave your land and your relatives and go to the land which I will show you.’ ⁴So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God made him move to this land in which you now dwell. ⁵And there, he did not give him anything that was his own, not even the smallest portion of land to put his foot on; but promised to give it to him, in possession, and to his descendants, though he had no child. ⁶So God spoke: ‘Your descendants shall live in a strange land. They shall be enslaved and maltreated for four hundred years. ⁷So, I shall call the nation, which they serve as slaves, to render an account for it. They will come out and worship me in this place.’

⁸He made with him, the Covenant of circumcision. And so, at the birth

of his son Isaac, Abraham circumcised him on the eighth day. Isaac did the same to Jacob, and Jacob, to the twelve patriarchs.

⁹The patriarchs envied Joseph, so they sold him into Egypt. But God was with him. ¹⁰He rescued him from all his afflictions, granted him wisdom, and made him please Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who appointed him governor of Egypt, and of the whole of his household. ¹¹Then there was famine in all the land of Egypt and Canaan; it was a great misery, and our ancestors did not have anything to eat. ¹²Upon learning that there was wheat in Egypt, Jacob sent our ancestors there on their first visit. ¹³On the second visit, Joseph made himself known to his brothers and Pharaoh came to know the family of Joseph. ¹⁴Joseph commanded that his father Jacob be brought to him, with the whole of his family of seventy-five persons. ¹⁵Jacob then went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors died. ¹⁶They were transferred to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor at Shechem.

¹⁷As the time of promise drew near, which God had made to Abraham, the people increased, and multiplied in Egypt ¹⁸until came another king who did not know Joseph. ¹⁹Dealing cunningly with our race, he forced our ancestors to abandon their newborn infants and let them die. ²⁰At that time, Moses was born and God looked kindly on him. For three months he was nursed in the home of his father; ²¹and when they abandoned him, Pharaoh's daughter took him and raised him as her own son. ²²So, Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. He was mighty in word and deed. ²³And when he was forty years old, he wanted to visit his own people, the Israelites. ²⁴When he saw one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and killed the Egyptian. ²⁵He thought his kinsfolk would understand that God was sending him to them as a liberator, but they did not understand. ²⁶On the following day, he came to them as they were fighting and tried to reconcile them, saying: 'You are brothers, why do you hurt each other?' ²⁷At that moment, the one who was injuring his companion rebuffed him, saying: 'Who appointed you as our leader and judge?' ²⁸Do you want to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' ²⁹When Moses heard this, he fled and went to live as a stranger in the land of Midian, where he had two sons.

³⁰After forty years, an angel appeared to him in the desert of Mount Sinai in the flame of a burning bush. ³¹Moses was astonished at the

vision. And as he approached to look at it, he heard the voice of the Lord: ³²‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’ Moses was filled with fear and did not dare look at it. ³³But the Lord said to him: ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you stand is holy ground. ³⁴I have seen the affliction of my people in Egypt and heard them weeping, and I have come down to free them. And now, get up! I am sending you to Egypt.’

³⁵This Moses, whom they rejected, saying: ‘Who appointed you leader and judge?’ God sent, as leader and liberator with the assistance of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶He led them out, performing signs and wonders in Egypt at the Red Sea and in the desert for forty years. ³⁷This Moses is the one who said to the Israelites: ‘God will give you a prophet like me, from among your own people.’ ³⁸This is the one who, in the assembly in the desert, became the mediator between the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai and our ancestors; and he received the words of life, that he might communicate them to us.

³⁹But our ancestors refused to obey, they rejected him and turned their hearts to Egypt, saying to Aaron: ⁴⁰‘Give us gods to lead us, since we do not know what has happened to that Moses, who brought us out of Egypt.’ ⁴¹So, in those days, they fashioned a calf, offered sacrifices to their idol and rejoiced in the work of their hands. ⁴²So God departed from them and let them worship the stars of heaven, as it is written in the Book of the Prophets: ‘People of Israel, did you offer me burnt offerings and sacrifices for forty years in the desert?’ ⁴³No, you carried instead the tent of Moloch and the star of the god Rehan; images you made to worship; for this, I will banish you farther than Babylon.’

⁴⁴Our ancestors had the Tent of Meeting in the desert, for God had directed Moses to build it according to the pattern he had seen. ⁴⁵Our ancestors received it and brought it under the command of Joshua into the lands of the pagans that they conquered and whom God expelled before them. They kept it until the days of David, ⁴⁶who found favor with God; and asked him to let him build a house for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷However, it was Solomon who built that temple.

⁴⁸In reality, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands, as the Prophet says: ⁴⁹‘*Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool. What house will you build for me, says the Lord, how could you give me a dwelling place?*’ ⁵⁰*Was it not I who made all these things?*’

⁵¹But you are a stubborn people. You hardened your hearts and closed your ears. You have always resisted the Holy Spirit, just as your fathers did. ⁵²Was there a prophet whom your ancestors did not persecute? They killed those who announced the coming of the Just One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered; ⁵³you who received the law through the angels but did not fulfill it.”

ACTS 6:8—7:53

Read: Stephen is arrested and brought to trial. In court, he reviews the history of salvation and how Israel did not recognize the presence of God in Jesus and killed him.

Reflect: Why throughout history so many people who acted in the name of God have been killed? How do you act in this situation? Do you rely more on dialogue rather than violence?

Pray: Remember past experiences, and ask the Spirit to give you light to discover the presence of God in them and even learn from your own mistakes.

Act: If you have a conflict with someone discuss it, apologize if necessary, and see in it the presence of God in your life.

⁵⁴When they heard this reproach, they were enraged; and they gnashed their teeth against Stephen. ⁵⁵But he, full of the Holy Spirit, fixed his eyes on heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus at God’s right hand; ⁵⁶so he declared: “I see the heavens open and the Son of Man at the right hand of God.”

⁵⁷But they shouted and covered their ears with their hands and rushed together upon him. ⁵⁸They brought him out of the city and stoned him, and the witnesses laid down their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹As they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, saying: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰Then he knelt down and said in a loud voice: “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he died.

8¹Saul was there, approving his murder. This was the beginning of a great persecution against the Church in Jerusalem. All except the apostles were scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria.

²Devout men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³Saul, meanwhile, was trying to destroy the church. He entered house after house and dragged off men and women and had them put in jail.

ACTS 7:54–8:3

Read: After his testimony of faith, Stephen is martyred. A great persecution of Christians takes place in which Saul, the future Paul, actively collaborates.

Reflect: Martyr is one who bears witness of Jesus Christ up to death. Are there still martyrs nowadays? Would you give your life for Jesus?

Pray: Pray that, like Stephen, you will also have the strength to speak and act as Jesus did.

Act: Do not be embarrassed to be a Christian to people who deny the faith. Like Stephen, be consistent and give reasons for it. Look for the opportunity to talk about your faith with someone you know who does not believe in Jesus Christ.

Philip proclaims the word in Samaria

⁴At the same time, those who were scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵Philip went down to a town of Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. ⁶All the people paid close attention to what Philip said as they listened to him and saw the miraculous signs that he did. ⁷For, in cases of possession the unclean spirits came out shrieking loudly. Many people who were paralyzed or crippled were healed. ⁸So there was great joy in that town.

Simon the magician

⁹A certain man named Simon had come to this town practicing magic. He held the Samaritans spellbound; and passed himself off as a very important person. ¹⁰All the people from the least to the greatest put their trust in him saying, “This is the Power of God, the Great One.” ¹¹And they followed him because he had held them under the spell of his magic for a long time. ¹²But when they came to believe Philip, who announced to them the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ as Savior, both men and women were baptized.

¹³Simon himself, believed, and was baptized, and would not depart from Philip. He was astonished when he saw the miraculous signs and wonders that happened.

¹⁴Now, when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the Samaritans had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. ¹⁵They went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; ¹⁶for he had not as yet come down upon any of them since they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷So Peter and John laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸When Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹saying, "Give me also this power, so that anyone upon whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

²⁰Peter replied, "May you and your money perish for thinking that the gift of God could be bought with money! ²¹You cannot share in this since you do not understand the things of God. ²²Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours and pray to the Lord that you may be forgiven such a wrong way of thinking; ²³I see you are poisoned with bitterness and in the grip of sin." ²⁴Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves so that none of these things you spoke of will happen to me."

²⁵Peter and John gave their testimony and spoke the word of the Lord. And they went back to Jerusalem, bringing the Good News to many Samaritan villages along the way.

Philip baptizes the Ethiopian

²⁶An angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south, toward the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, the desert road." ²⁷So he set out and it happened that an Ethiopian was passing along that way. He was an official in charge of the treasury of the queen of the Ethiopians. He had come on pilgrimage to Jerusalem ²⁸and was on his way home. He was sitting in his carriage and reading the prophet Isaiah.

²⁹The Spirit said to Philip, "Go and catch up with that carriage." ³⁰So Philip ran up and heard the man reading the prophet Isaiah; and he asked, "Do you really understand what you are reading?" The Ethiopian replied, ³¹"How can I, unless someone explains it to me?" He then invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. ³²This was the passage of Scripture he was reading:

He was led like a sheep to be slaughtered; like a lamb that is dumb before the shearer, he did not open his mouth. ³³He was humbled and deprived of his rights. Who can speak of his descendants? For he was uprooted from the earth.

³⁴The official asked Philip, “Tell me, please, does the prophet speak of himself or of someone else?”

³⁵Then Philip began to tell him the Good News of Jesus using this text of Scripture as his starting point. ³⁶As they traveled down the road, they came to a place where there was some water. Then the Ethiopian official said, “Look, here is water; what is to keep me from being baptized?” (³⁷)

³⁸Then he ordered the carriage to stop. Both Philip and the Ethiopian went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹When they came out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord took Philip away. The Ethiopian saw him no more, but he continued on his way full of joy.

⁴⁰Philip found himself at Azotus, and he went about announcing the Good News in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

ACTS 8:4-40

Read: Philip preached in Samaria, where the magician Simon is cursed for trying to buy the power to heal from Peter and John. The Ethiopian eunuch gets converted when Philip explains to him that the promises of Scripture are fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Reflect: Should we still proclaim the Gospel message outside the community of believers? Why? Are you able to differentiate faith and superstitions? Do you think your faith has something of superstition? Why?

Pray: Pray that your testimony of life attracts others to Christianity.

Act: Like Philip, take the time to listen and patiently explain the faith to someone who would like to learn about it.

Saul meets Jesus

9¹Meanwhile, Saul considered nothing but violence and death for the disciples of the Lord. ²He went to the High Priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues of Damascus that would authorize him to

arrest, and bring to Jerusalem, anyone he might find, man or woman, belonging to the Way.

³As he traveled along and was approaching Damascus, a light from the sky suddenly flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?” ⁵And he asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The voice replied, “I am Jesus, whom you persecute. ⁶Now get up and go into the city; there, you will be told what you are to do.”

⁷The men who were traveling with him stood there speechless: they had heard the sound but could see no one. ⁸Saul got up from the ground and, opening his eyes, he could not see. They took him by the hand and brought him to Damascus. ⁹He was blind, and he did not eat or drink for three days.

¹⁰There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias, to whom the Lord called in a vision, “Ananias!” He answered, “Here I am, Lord!” ¹¹Then the Lord said to him, “Go at once to Straight Street and ask at the house of Judas for a man of Tarsus named Saul. You will find him praying, ¹²for he has just seen in a vision that a man named Ananias has come in and placed his hands upon him to restore his sight.”

¹³Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many sources about this man, and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; ¹⁴and now he is here with authority from the High Priest, to arrest all who call upon your name.” ¹⁵But the Lord said to him, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to bring my name to the pagan nations and their kings and the people of Israel as well. ¹⁶I myself will show him how much he will have to suffer for my name.”

¹⁷So Ananias left and went to the house. He laid his hands upon Saul and said, “Saul, my brother, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me to you so that you may receive your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸Immediately, something like scales fell from his eyes and he could see; he got up and was baptized. ¹⁹Then he took food and was strengthened.

ACTS 9:1-19a

Read: After having been present at the stoning of Stephen, Saul experiences a profound conversion on the road to Damascus.

Ananias is initially reluctant to welcome him; however, the Lord reassures Ananias that Saul has been chosen for a special role.

Reflect: What would actually be Paul's conversion experience? Have you experienced something similar? As Ananias, would you be willing to welcome a former persecutor of the Christian faith?

Pray: Be thankful for moments or processes of conversion to faith. Ask also for the grace to overcome prejudices and be open to new ways of relating to others.

Act: Saul is helped by others and led by the hand to Ananias. Seek out an individual to whom you can lend a helping hand on the road to faith.

For several days Saul stayed with the disciples at Damascus,²⁰ and he soon began to proclaim in the synagogues that Jesus was the Son of God.²¹ All who heard were astonished and said, "Is this not the one who cast out in Jerusalem all those calling upon this Name? Did he not come here to bring them bound before the chief priests?"

²²But Saul grew more and more powerful and he confounded the Jews living in Damascus when he proved that Jesus was the Messiah.

²³After a fairly long time, the Jews conspired together to kill him.²⁴ But Saul became aware of their plan: Day and night they kept watch at the city gate in order to kill him.²⁵ So his disciples took him one night and let him down from the top of the wall, lowering him in a basket.

²⁶When Saul came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples there, but they were afraid of him because they could not believe that he was a disciple.²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He recounted to them how Saul had seen the Lord on his way and the words the Lord had spoken to him. He told them also, how Saul had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

²⁸Then Saul began to live with them. He moved about freely in Jerusalem and preached openly in the name of the Lord.²⁹ He also spoke to the Hellenists, and argued with them. But they wanted to kill him.³⁰ When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

³¹Meanwhile, the Church had peace. It was building up throughout all

Judea and Galilee and Samaria, with eyes turned to the Lord and filled with comfort from the Holy Spirit.

ACTS 9:19b-31

Read: Saul spends time in Damascus and his presence creates confusion in others because of the radical change he has experienced. After escaping from there, he is presented to the apostles in Jerusalem. He preaches the Gospel fearlessly and is recognized as a Christian.

Reflect: No one should be condemned for their past, it is necessary to listen, to help, to understand and to guide the person to Jesus Christ. Why is it so hard to accept and believe in someone whose life has changed? What can you do to make others believe in Jesus Christ?

Pray: Ask God to help you change aspects of your life that require conversion. Ask also for a willingness to welcome and accept new converts to the faith.

Act: Like Barnabas, take the initiative to introduce a person who is unknown to others. Speak favorably and in a positive way about this individual and help him or her feel welcome.

Peter visits the churches

³²As Peter traveled around, he went to visit the saints who lived in Lydda. ³³There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years. ³⁴Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed!” And the man got up at once. ³⁵All the people living in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

³⁶There was a disciple in Joppa named Tabitha, which means Dorcas, or Gazelle. She was always doing good works and helping the poor. ³⁷At that time she fell sick and died. After having washed her body, they laid her in the upstairs room.

³⁸As Lydda is near Joppa, the disciples, on hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, “Please come to us without delay.”

³⁹So Peter went with them. On his arrival, they took him upstairs to

the room. All the widows crowded around him in tears, showing him the clothes that Dorcas had made while she was with them. ⁴⁰Peter made them all leave the room, and then he knelt down and prayed. Turning to the dead body, he said, “Tabitha, stand up.” She opened her eyes, looked at Peter and sat up. ⁴¹Peter gave her his hand and helped her up. Then he called in the saints and widows and presented her to them alive. ⁴²This became known throughout all Joppa and many people believed in the Lord because of it. ⁴³As for Peter, he remained for some time in Joppa at the house of Simon a tanner of leather.

ACTS 9:32-43

Read: Peter performs healing miracles in Lydda and Jaffa in the name of Jesus Christ. Because of this, many welcome the announcement of the Good News.

Reflect: What does Jesus need to heal you from your paralytic faith? What work can you do to help others deepen their beliefs and live in a manner more consistent with the Gospel?

Pray: Ask God to help you overcome what paralyzes you. In a special way, pray for the sick and the afflicted.

Act: Make a kind gesture that will bring the presence of God to a sick person. Find someone who lives sad and hopeless, and share the joy of knowing that God is always with us.

The baptism of Cornelius

10¹There was in Caesarea a man named Cornelius, captain of what was called the Italian Battalion. ²He was a religious and God-fearing man, together with his whole household. He gave generously to the people and constantly prayed to God.

³One afternoon, at about three, he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming toward him and calling him, “Cornelius!” ⁴He stared at the vision with awe and said, “What is it, sir?” And the angel answered, “Your prayers and your alms have just been recalled before God. ⁵Now send some men to Joppa, and summon a certain Simon, also known as Peter; ⁶he is the guest of Simon, a tanner, who lives beside the sea.”

⁷As soon as the angel who spoke to him departed, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those attached to his service ⁸and, after having explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

⁹The next day, while they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up to the roof at about noon to pray. ¹⁰He became hungry and wished to eat, but while they were preparing food, he fell into a trance. ¹¹The heavens were opened to him and he saw an object that looked like a large sheet coming down until it rested on the ground by its four corners. ¹²In it were all kinds of four-legged animals of the earth, reptiles, and birds.

¹³Then a voice said to him, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!" ¹⁴But Peter replied, "Certainly not, Lord! I have never eaten any defiled or unclean creature." ¹⁵And again a second time the voice spoke, "What God has made clean you must not call unclean." ¹⁶This happened three times, and then the sheet was taken up again into the sky.

¹⁷While Peter was still puzzling over the meaning of the vision he had seen, the messengers of Cornelius arrived at the gate asking for the house of Simon. ¹⁸They called out to inquire whether Simon, also known as Peter, was staying there. ¹⁹At that moment, as Peter continued pondering on the vision, the Spirit spoke to him, "There are men looking for you; ²⁰get up and go downstairs and follow them without hesitation, for I have sent them."

²¹So Peter went and said to the men, "I am the one you are looking for. What brings you here?" They answered, ²²"He who sent us is Captain Cornelius. He is an upright and God-fearing man, well respected by all the Jewish people. He has been instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, so that he may listen to what you have to say." ²³So Peter invited them in and put them up for the night.

The next day, he went off with them and some of the believers from Joppa accompanied him. ²⁴The following day, he arrived in Caesarea, where Cornelius was expecting them; he had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵As Peter was about to enter, Cornelius went to him, fell on his knees and bowed low. ²⁶But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up, for I too am a human being."

²⁷After talking with him, Peter entered and found many people assembled there. ²⁸Then he said to them, "You know that it is forbidden for

Jews to associate with anyone of another nation, or to enter their houses. But God has made it clear to me that no one should call any person common or unclean;²⁹ because of this, I came at once when I was sent for. Now, I should like to know why you sent for me.”

³⁰Cornelius then answered, “Just three days ago at this time, about three in the afternoon, I was praying in my house when a man in shining clothes stood before me³¹ and said to me: ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer, and your alms have been remembered before him.³² Send someone, therefore, to Joppa and ask for Simon, also known as Peter, who is guest at the house of Simon the tanner by the sea.’³³ So I sent for you at once and you have been kind enough to come. Now we are all here in God’s presence, waiting to hear all that the Lord has commanded you to say.”

ACTS 10:1-33

Read: During prayer, both Cornelius and Peter experience profound visions that offer new insides into their lives. Everything God has made is good, and we cannot judge it as bad.

Reflect: Why is it important to grow in faith and expand our view of the world? Can a Christian prejudge people by their race when Jesus Christ came to save all humankind? Do you have a need to eradicate any prejudice?

Pray: Ask for the help of the Spirit to be always open to new and different perceptions of God and the world. Pray that all kinds of prejudice be banished in your community.

Act: Empty your mind of any kind of racism or prejudice. Be a welcoming person performing a specific gesture to someone who may feel marginalized.

³⁴Peter then spoke to them, “Truly, I realize that God does not show partiality,³⁵ but in all nations, he listens to everyone who fears God and does good.³⁶ And this is the message he has sent to the children of Israel, the good news of peace he has proclaimed through Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of all.³⁷ No doubt you have heard of the event that occurred throughout the whole country of the Jews beginning from Galilee, after the baptism John preached.³⁸ You know how God anointed Jesus

the Nazorean with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all who were under the devil's power because God was with him; ³⁹we are witnesses of all that he did throughout the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem itself. Yet, they put him to death by hanging him on a wooden cross.

⁴⁰But God raised him to life on the third day and let him manifest himself, ⁴¹not to all the people, but to the witnesses that were chosen beforehand by God—to us who ate and drank with him after his resurrection from death. ⁴²And he commanded us to preach to the people and to bear witness, that he is the one appointed by God to judge the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets say of him, that everyone who believes in him has forgiveness of sins through his name.”

⁴⁴Peter was still speaking when the Holy Spirit came upon all who listened to the word. ⁴⁵And the believers of Jewish origin who had come with Peter were amazed, “Why! God gives and pours the Holy Spirit on foreigners also!” ⁴⁶For indeed, this happened: they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

⁴⁷Then Peter declared, “Can we refuse to baptize with water these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” ⁴⁸So he had them baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. After that, they asked him to remain with them for some days.

ACTS 10:34-48

Read: In his speech, Peter explains to Cornelius and his family, a non-Jewish people, what the Christian faith is and that we are all equal. After listening to him, all receive the Holy Spirit.

Reflect: Why is the sentence “God does not show partiality” at the beginning of Peter’s speech? Do all people have the right to receive Jesus Christ in their life? Can anyone be excluded from salvation?

Pray: Support the missionaries, through prayers, in their efforts to evangelize those who are further away from the faith. Ask for the willingness to understand all people.

Act: Many who are not Christians live a Christian life. Do you know any of these people? Talk and learn from them.

Peter justifies his conduct

11¹News came to the apostles and the brothers and sisters in Judea that even foreigners had received the word of God. ²So, when Peter went up to Jerusalem, these Jewish believers began to argue with him, ³“You went to the home of uncircumcised people and ate with them!”

⁴So Peter began to give them the facts as they had happened, ⁵“I was at prayer in the city of Joppa when, in a trance, I saw a vision. Something like a large sheet came down from the sky and drew near to me, landing on the ground by its four corners. ⁶As I stared at it, I saw four-legged creatures of the earth, wild beasts and reptiles, and birds of the sky. ⁷Then I heard a voice saying to me: ‘Get up, Peter, kill and eat!’ ⁸I replied, ‘Certainly not, Lord! No common or unclean creature has ever entered my mouth.’ ⁹A second time the voice from the heavens spoke, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call unclean.’ ¹⁰This happened three times, and then it was all drawn up into the sky. ¹¹At that moment, three men, who had been sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were staying. ¹²The Spirit instructed me to go with them without hesitation; so these six brothers came along with me and we entered into the man’s house. ¹³He told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house and telling him: ‘Send someone to Joppa and fetch Simon, also known as Peter. ¹⁴He will bring you a message by which you and all your household will be saved.’

¹⁵I had begun to address them when suddenly the Holy Spirit came upon them, just as it had come upon us at the beginning. ¹⁶Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷If, then, God had given them the same gift that he had given us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to resist God?”

¹⁸When they heard this they set their minds at rest and praised God saying, “Then God has granted life-giving repentance to the pagan nations as well.”

ACTS 11:1-18

Read: Peter is questioned in Jerusalem because he got together with the Gentiles. He uses his latest vision to support

his actions: God has also granted to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.

Reflect: What is the similarity of the coming of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles, and what happened on Pentecost? Does anyone have the authority to remove/separate a faithful from the faith of the Church?

Pray: Pray that the Holy Spirit fill you and allow you to see life from a new perspective. Ask God to help you understand that all can be a Christian if someone talks to them about faith that leads them to conversion.

Act: Like Peter, be willing to accept a new spiritual perception to change your attitude toward others. Have a gesture of harmony with someone who does not share your political, social or religious views.

The foundation of the Church at Antioch

¹⁹Those who had been scattered, because of the persecution over Stephen, traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, proclaiming the message, but only to the Jews. ²⁰But there were some natives of Cyprus and Cyrene among them who, on coming into Antioch, spoke also to the Greeks giving them the good news of the Lord Jesus. ²¹The hand of the Lord was with them so that a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

²²News of this reached the ears of the Church in Jerusalem, so they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³When he arrived and saw the manifest signs of God's favor, he rejoiced and urged them all to remain firmly faithful to the Lord; ²⁴for he, himself, was a good man, filled with the Holy Spirit and faith. Thus large crowds came to know the Lord.

²⁵Then Barnabas went off to Tarsus, to look for Saul; ²⁶and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year, they had meetings with the Church and instructed many people. It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called *Christians*.

²⁷At that time, some prophets went down from Jerusalem to Antioch; ²⁸and one of them named Agabus, inspired by the Holy Spirit, foretold that a great famine would spread over the whole world. This actually happened in the days of Emperor Claudius. ²⁹So the disciples decided,

within their means, to set something aside and to send relief to the brothers and sisters who were living in Judea. ³⁰They did this and sent their donations to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

ACTS 11:19-30

Read: The early Church continues to grow, expanding with Gentile converts in Antioch. Barnabas is sent from Jerusalem to investigate. He goes to Tarsus seeking Saul and brings him back to Antioch, where the disciples are called Christians for the first time.

Reflect: Why do so many people embrace the faith proclaimed by the early Church? What does it mean to you to be “Christian”?

Pray: Pray that every day many people may know Jesus Christ and embrace him as their Savior. Pray for those who are considering becoming Christians and for the catechumens, that they may not be discouraged by difficulties and always receive the power of the Spirit.

Act: Be consistent with the Christian faith you profess. Let your faith shine by your testimony, especially before those who doubt. Perform an act of solidarity with the community when the occasion arises.

James is put to death; Peter’s miraculous escape

12¹About that time, King Herod decided to persecute some members of the Church. ²He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword, ³and when he saw how it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.

This happened during the festival of the Unleavened Bread. ⁴Herod had him seized and thrown into prison with four squads, each of four soldiers, to guard him. He wanted to bring him to trial before the people after the Passover feast, ⁵but while Peter was kept in prison, the whole Church prayed earnestly for him.

⁶On the very night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound by a double chain, while guards kept watch at the gate of the prison.

⁷Suddenly, an angel of the Lord stood there and a light shone in the

prison cell. The angel tapped Peter on the side and woke him saying, "Get up quickly!" At once, the chains fell from Peter's wrists. The angel said, "Put on your belt and your sandals." Peter did so; ⁸and the angel added, "Now, put on your cloak and follow me."

⁹Peter followed him out, yet he did not realize that what was happening with the angel was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰They passed the first guard and then the second, and they came to the iron door leading out to the city, which opened by itself for them. They went out and made their way down a narrow alley when suddenly the angel left him.

¹¹Then Peter recovered his senses and said, "Now I know that the Lord has sent his angel and has rescued me from Herod's clutches and from all that the Jews had in store for me."

¹²Peter then found his bearings and came to the house of Mary, the mother of John also known as Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. ¹³When he knocked at the outside door, a maid named Rhoda came to answer it. ¹⁴On recognizing the voice of Peter she was so overcome with joy that, instead of opening the door, she ran in to announce that Peter was at the door. ¹⁵They said to her, "You are crazy!" And as she insisted, they said, "It must be his angel."

¹⁶Meanwhile, Peter continued knocking and, when they finally opened the door, they were amazed to see him. ¹⁷He motioned to them with his hand to be quiet and told them how the Lord had brought him out of prison. And he said to them, "Report this to James and to the brothers." Then he left and went to another place.

¹⁸At daybreak, there was a great commotion among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. ¹⁹Herod began a search for him and, not finding him, had the guards questioned and executed. After that, he came down from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there.

Herod's death

²⁰At that time, Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. By general agreement they appeared before him and, after having won over Blastus, the king's treasurer, they asked for peace, for their country was supplied with food from the territory of Herod. ²¹On the appointed day Herod, clothed in royal robes, sat on his throne and addressed them. ²²So the assembled crowd shouted back, "A god is speaking, not a man!"

²³The angel of the Lord immediately struck Herod for he did not return the honor to God, and he died eaten by worms.

²⁴Meanwhile, the word of God was increasing and spreading. ²⁵Barnabas and Saul carried out their mission and then came back to Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.

ACTS 12:1-25

Read: King Herod has James, the brother of John, put to death and Peter, imprisoned. Peter's unexpected release from prison results in a humorous scene. He then goes to the community who is praying for him. We also learn of Herod's gruesome death.

Reflect: Martyrdom is a seed that converts new people to Christianity. What difficulties can "prevent us" from witnessing our faith? Have you ever felt liberated by God?

Pray: Ask for the courage of the martyrs so that nothing prevents you from witnessing your faith in adverse situations. Pray to God to protect the missionaries from dangers.

Act: Do not be afraid to give testimony to your faith in difficult situations. Trust in the care and protection that God offers to His followers.

Paul sent by the Church

13¹There were at Antioch—in the Church which was there—prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Symeon known as Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod, and Saul. ²On one occasion, while they were celebrating the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said to them, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul to do the work for which I have called them." ³So, after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Paul's first mission

⁴These then, sent by the Holy Spirit, went down to the port of Seleucia and from there sailed to Cyprus. ⁵Upon their arrival in Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogue; John was with them as an assistant.

⁶They traveled over the whole island as far as Paphos, where they met a certain magician named Bar-Jesus, a Jewish false prophet, ⁷who lived with the governor Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. He had summoned Barnabas and Saul, and wanted to hear the word of God. ⁸But they were opposed by the Elymas (that is, the magician) who tried to turn the governor from the faith.

⁹Then Saul, also known as Paul, full of the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰and said, “You son of the devil, full of all kinds of deceit, and enemy of all that is right! Will you never stop perverting the straight paths of the Lord? ¹¹Now, the Lord’s hand is upon you; you will become blind and, for a time, you will not see the light of day.” At once, a misty darkness came upon him and he groped about for someone to lead him by the hand.

¹²The governor saw what had happened; he believed and was deeply impressed by the teaching about the Lord.

ACTS 13:1-12

Read: After spending time in prayer and fasting, the Holy Spirit chooses Barnabas and Paul to proclaim the Gospel beyond the Church of Antioch, which is a pagan territory.

Reflect: Is it important that the community takes time for prayer and fasting before sending their missionaries? Why? How do you collaborate with this endeavor?

Pray: There are false prophets, people who would deliberately deceive others. Pray that they change their attitudes. Ask for light to distinguish God’s words from the words of people, and courage to denounce those that are false.

Act: In times of adversity, challenge your community to always pray to God to help them discern for the best decision.

Paul in the capital of Pisidia

¹³From Paphos, Paul and his companions set sail and came to Perga in Pamphylia. There, John left them and returned to Jerusalem, ¹⁴while they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. On the Sabbath day, they entered the synagogue and sat down. ¹⁵After the reading of the law and the prophets, the officials of the synagogue sent this

message to them, “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the assembly, please speak up.”

¹⁶So Paul arose, motioned to them for silence and began, “Fellow Israelites and also all you who fear God, listen. ¹⁷The God of our people Israel chose our ancestors; and after he had made them increase during their stay in Egypt, he led them out by powerful deeds. ¹⁸For forty years he fed them in the desert; ¹⁹and after he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. ²⁰All this took four hundred and fifty years. ²¹After that, he gave them Judges, until Samuel the prophet. Then they asked for a king; and God gave them Saul, son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin; and he was king for forty years. ²²After that time, God removed him and raised up David as king, to whom he bore witness saying: *I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, who will do all I want him to do.*

²³It is from the descendants of David that God has now raised up the promised Savior of Israel, Jesus. ²⁴Before he appeared, John proclaimed a baptism of repentance for all the people of Israel. ²⁵As John was ending his life’s work, he said: ‘I am not what you think I am, for after me another one is coming, whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.’

²⁶Brothers, children, and descendants of Abraham, and you also who fear God, it is to you that this message of salvation has been sent. ²⁷It is a fact, that the inhabitants of Jerusalem and their leaders did not recognize Jesus. Yet, in condemning him, they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath, but not understood. ²⁸Even though they found no charge against him that deserved death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. ²⁹And after they had carried out all that had been written concerning him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb.

³⁰But God raised him from the dead, ³¹and for many days thereafter he showed himself to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They have now become his witnesses before the people. ³²We, ourselves, announce to you this Good News: All that God promised our ancestors, ³³he has fulfilled for us, their descendants, by raising Jesus, according to what is written in the second Psalm: *You are my Son, today I have begotten you.* ³⁴On raising him from the dead, so that he would never know the decay of death, God fulfilled his promise: *I will give you the holy blessings, the sure ones that I kept for David.*

³⁵Moreover, in another place it is said: *You will not allow your holy one to suffer corruption.* ³⁶Now David was subjected to corruption for he died and was laid beside his ancestors after having served God's purpose in his own time. ³⁷But the one God raised up—Jesus—did not know corruption. ³⁸⁻³⁹Through him, fellow Israelites, you have forgiveness of sins, and this is our good news. Whoever believes in him is freed of everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.

⁴⁰Now, watch out, lest what was said by the prophet happens to you: ⁴¹*Take care, you cynics; be amazed and disappear! For I am about to do something in your days which you would never believe even if you had been told.*"

⁴²As Paul and Barnabas withdrew, they were invited to speak again on the same subject the following Sabbath. ⁴³After that, when the assembly broke up, many Jews and devout God-fearing people followed them; and to these they spoke, urging them to hold fast to the grace of God.

ACTS 13:13-43

Read: Paul arrives with his companions in Antioch in Pisidia and delivered an important sermon at the synagogue. He explains how the history of Israel is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Many Jews are converted.

Reflect: Compare this discourse of Paul with Peter's discourse on Pentecost (Acts 2:14-40). Early Christianity made its way with the proclamation of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross, and whom God resurrected. Christianity is primarily witnessing life and faith.

Pray: Pray that the cross of Jesus Christ gives meaning to your life and to the suffering of so many people in history. Ask for the grace of being able to contemplate the victory of life over death.

Act: In suffering, remember the cross of Jesus Christ and live it with courage and without fear, knowing that with Christ's resurrection life triumphs over death.

⁴⁴The following Sabbath almost the entire city gathered to listen to Paul, who spoke a fairly long time about the Lord. ⁴⁵But the presence of such a crowd made the Jews jealous. So they began to oppose with insults, whatever Paul said.

⁴⁶Then Paul and Barnabas spoke out firmly, saying, “It was necessary that God’s word be first proclaimed to you, but since you now reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we turn to non-Jewish people. ⁴⁷For thus we were commanded by the Lord: *I have set you as a light to the pagan nations, so that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.*”

⁴⁸Those who were not Jews rejoiced, when they heard this, and praised the message of the Lord; and all those destined for everlasting life believed in it. ⁴⁹Thus the word spread, throughout the whole region.

⁵⁰Some of the Jews, however, incited God-fearing women of the upper class and the leading men of the city as well and stirred up an intense persecution against Paul and Barnabas. Finally, they had them expelled from their region. ⁵¹The apostles shook the dust from their feet in protest against this people and went to Iconium, ⁵²leaving the disciples filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

ACTS 13:44-52

Read: The Jews reject the preaching of Paul and Barnabas, and so they start to preach to the Gentiles, who rejoice and welcome this Good News.

Reflect: Why can the Christian message be rejected? Have you ever done it? How was your initiation to the faith?

Pray: Give thanks for your faith in Jesus Christ and ask for courage to never reject him, even in situations that may cause your rejection because of him.

Act: Celebrate often your faith in community and talk about it without fear.

Iconium is evangelized

14¹In Iconium Paul and Barnabas likewise went into the Jewish synagogue and preached in such a manner that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed. ²But the Jews, who would not believe,

stirred up the pagan people and poisoned their minds against the brothers. ³In spite of this, Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there. They spoke fearlessly of the Lord who confirmed the message of his grace with the miraculous signs and wonders he gave them the power to do.

⁴But the people of the city were divided, some siding with the Jews and some with the apostles. ⁵A move was made by pagans and Jews, together with their leaders, to harm the apostles and to stone them. ⁶But Paul and Barnabas learned of this and fled to the Lycaonian towns of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding countryside, ⁷where they continued preaching the Good News.

Lystra and Derbe

Paul and Barnabas spent a fairly long time at Lystra. ⁸There was a crippled man in Lystra who had never been able to stand or walk. ⁹One day, as he was listening to the preaching, Paul looked intently at him and saw that he had the faith to be saved. ¹⁰So he said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And the man leaped up and began walking.

¹¹When the people saw what Paul had done, they cried out in the language of Lycaonia, "The gods have come to us in human likeness!" ¹²They named Barnabas Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes since he was the chief speaker. ¹³Even the priest of the temple of Zeus, which stood outside the town, brought oxen and garlands to the gate; together with the people, he wanted to offer sacrifice to them.

¹⁴When Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their garments to show their indignation and rushed into the crowd, shouting, ¹⁵"Friends, why are you doing this? We are human beings, with the same weakness you have, and we are now telling you to turn away from these useless things, to the living God who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and all that is in them. ¹⁶In past generations he allowed each nation to go its own way, ¹⁷though he never stopped making himself known; for he is continually doing good, giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, providing you with food and filling your hearts with gladness."

¹⁸Even these words could hardly keep the crowd from offering sacrifice to them.

¹⁹Then some Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium and turned the people against them. They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the town,

leaving him for dead. ²⁰But, when his disciples gathered around him, he stood up and returned to the town. And the next day, he left for Derbe with Barnabas.

ACTS 14:1-20

Read: Paul and Barnabas continue their mission. Their preaching generates conflicts. They are deified by the powerful works they perform, but they are also mistreated. And still, they continue.

Reflect: God works wonders through his servants. By their works, they can either be deified or despised. Have you felt praise and scorn for expressing your faith? Where do you get the strength to get up?

Pray: Ask a courageous attitude like the one of Paul and Barnabas to proclaim your faith. Ask also for the grace to express through your work the presence of God in the world.

Act: Perform a gesture for which God can be present among others. Like Paul, get up and start again before the next problem comes.

Return to Antioch

²¹After proclaiming the gospel in that town and making many disciples, they returned to Lystra and Iconium, and on to Antioch. ²²They were strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain firm in the faith; for they said, “We must go through many trials to enter the kingdom of God.” ²³In each church they appointed elders and, after praying and fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had placed their faith.

²⁴Then they traveled through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. ²⁵They preached the word in Perga and went down to Attalia. ²⁶From there, they sailed back to Antioch, where they had first been commended to God’s grace for the task they had now completed.

²⁷On their arrival, they gathered the Church together and told them all that God had done through them, and how he had opened the door of faith to the non-Jews. ²⁸They spent a fairly long time there with the disciples.

ACTS 14:21-28

Read: The first missionary journey ends with a positive and encouraging evaluation, with a good number of communities organized in distant cities. The Church has opened the door to the Gentiles since most of the Jews despise faith in Jesus Christ.

Reflect: “Reminding them that they had to go through many trials to enter the kingdom of God” (v. 22). Have you experienced that the kingdom of God enters through the narrow gate, with work and daily witness? In a matter of faith, where do you feel “at home”?

Pray: Give thanks for your church community. If you feel distant to it, ask for courage to approach it. Ask to have no fear of adversity.

Act: Thank publicly the presence of the community in your faith experience. Share with someone the good things God has done for you.

The council at Jerusalem

15¹Some persons who had come from Judea to Antioch were teaching the brothers in this way, “Unless you are circumcised, according to the law of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

²Because of this, there was trouble; and Paul and Barnabas had fierce arguments with them. For Paul told the people to remain as they were when they became believers. Finally, those who had come from Jerusalem suggested that Paul and Barnabas and some others go up to Jerusalem, to discuss the matter with the apostles and elders.

³They were sent on their way by the Church. As they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria they reported how the non-Jews had turned to God; and there was great joy among all the brothers and sisters.

⁴On their arrival in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the Church, the apostles and the elders, to whom they told all that God had done through them. ⁵Some believers, however, who belonged to the party of the Pharisees, stood up and said that non-Jewish men must be circumcised and instructed to keep the law of Moses. ⁶So the apostles and elders met together to consider this matter.

⁷As the discussions became heated, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that from the beginning, God chose me among you, so that non-Jews could hear the Good News from me and believe. ⁸God, who can read hearts, put himself on their side by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. ⁹He made no distinction between them and us, and cleansed their hearts through faith. ¹⁰So, why do you want to put God to the test? Why do you lay on the disciples a burden that neither our ancestors nor we, ourselves, were able to carry? ¹¹We believe, indeed, that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they are.”

¹²The whole assembly kept silent as they listened to Paul and Barnabas tell of all the miraculous signs and wonders that God had done, through them, among the non-Jews.

¹³After they had finished, James spoke up, “Listen to me, brothers. ¹⁴Symeon has just explained how God first showed his care by taking a people for himself from non-Jewish nations. ¹⁵And the words of the prophets agree with this, for Scripture says,

¹⁶After this I will return and rebuild the booth of David which has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins and set it up again. ¹⁷Then, the rest of humanity will look for the Lord, and all the nations will be consecrated to my Name. So says the Lord, who does today ¹⁸what he decided from the beginning.

¹⁹Because of this, I think that we should not make difficulties for those non-Jews who are turning to God. ²⁰Let us just tell them not to eat food that is unclean from having been offered to idols; to keep themselves from prohibited marriages; and not to eat the flesh of animals that have been strangled; or any blood. ²¹For, from the earliest times, Moses has been taught in every place, and every Sabbath his laws are recalled.”

ACTS 15:1-21

Read: There were complaints from some Jewish Christians. The issue of how to accept gentile converts is addressed in Jerusalem. Finally, it was decided to allow them to embrace the faith without having to meet all Jewish precepts.

Reflect: Do we need many precepts to be a good Christian? Where do these demands come from at times?

Pray: Ask the Spirit for light to differentiate the essential from the secondary in the experience of faith. Ask for an open mind and heart to accept other Christians who live their faith differently.

Act: Approach someone in your community whom you secretly reproach of something. Talk to him or her and try to understand and accept the person.

The council's letters

²²Then the apostles and elders, together with the whole Church, decided to choose representatives from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. These were Judas, known as Barsabbas, and Silas, both leading men among the brothers. ²³They took with them the following letter:

“Greetings from the apostles and elders, your brothers, to the believers of non-Jewish birth in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. ²⁴We have heard, that some persons from among us have worried you with their discussions, and troubled your peace of mind. They were not appointed by us. ²⁵But now, it has seemed right to us, in an assembly, to choose representatives and to send them to you, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶who have dedicated their lives to the service of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷We send you then, Judas and Silas, who, themselves, will give you these instructions by word of mouth.

²⁸We, with the Holy Spirit, have decided not to put any other burden on you except what is necessary: ²⁹You are to abstain from blood; from the meat of strangled animals; and from prohibited marriages. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

³⁰After saying good-bye, the messengers went to Antioch where they assembled the community and handed them the letter. ³¹When they read the news, all were delighted with the encouragement it gave them. ³²Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, spoke at length to encourage and strengthen them. ³³After they had spent some time there, the messengers were sent off in peace by the believers; ³⁴Silas, however, preferred to stay with them and only Judas went off. ³⁵So Paul and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching with many others, the word of God.

ACTS 15:22-35

Read: The Jerusalem Church, the Mother Church, informs the Gentiles, that they are welcomed into Christianity only by following the essential precepts.

Reflect: What is the role of the Spirit in the decision of the Church? How does the Spirit operate in your life? Do you feel how the Spirit frees you from worries?

Pray: Ask the inspiration of the Holy Spirit when you need to resolve conflicts at home, at work or in the community. Give thanks for the diversity of people who make up your environment.

Act: Identify the secondary aspects of Christian life and place them after the important ones.

Paul's second mission

³⁶After some days, Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the believers in every town where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, to see how they are getting on." ³⁷Barnabas wanted to take with them John, also called Mark, ³⁸but Paul did not think it right to take him, since he had not stayed with them to the end of their mission, but had turned back and left them in Pamphylia. ³⁹Such a sharp disagreement resulted that the two finally separated. Barnabas took Mark along with him and sailed for Cyprus. ⁴⁰Paul, for his part, chose Silas and left commended by the brothers and sisters to the grace of the Lord.

⁴¹He traveled throughout Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches there.

ACTS 15:36-41

Read: Determined to start their second voyage, a dispute between Paul and Barnabas over John, also called Mark, causes separation. Each follows his own path.

Reflect: What does the situation described in the text reveal regarding human nature? Have you experienced any similar situation? Can anything positive come out of that?

Pray: Ask for light to sense the presence of God amidst human

misunderstandings and disagreements. Give thanks for the times when this has happened and pray that you may continue to experience it.

Act: Overcome pride and try to reconcile with that person with whom you had any misunderstanding. If possible, look for the positive side of the situation.

Paul recruits Timothy

16¹Paul traveled on to Derbe and then to Lystra. A disciple named Timothy lived there whose mother was a believer of Jewish origin but whose father was a Greek. ²As the believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him, Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him. ³So he took him and because of the Jews of that place who all knew that his father was a Greek, he circumcised him.

⁴As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, for the people to obey. ⁵Meanwhile, the churches grew stronger in faith and increased in number every day.

⁶They traveled through Phrygia and Galatia, because they had been prevented by the Holy Spirit from preaching the message in the province of Asia. ⁷When they came to Mysia, they tried to go on to Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to do this. ⁸So passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas.

Paul goes to Macedonia

⁹There, one night, Paul had a vision. A Macedonian stood before him and begged him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us!” ¹⁰When he awoke, he told us of this vision; and we understood that the Lord was calling us to give the Good News to the Macedonian people.

¹¹So we put out to sea from Troas and sailed straight across to Samothrace Island and the next day to Neapolis. ¹²From there, we went inland to Philippi, the leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We spent some days in that city.

¹³On the Sabbath, we went outside the city gate to the bank of the river, where we thought the Jews would gather to pray. We sat down and

began speaking to the women who were gathering there. ¹⁴One of them was a God-fearing woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a dealer in purple cloth.

As she listened, the Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying. ¹⁵After she had been baptized, together with her household, she invited us to her house, “If you think I am faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us to accept her invitation.

ACTS 16:1-15

Read: While traveling, Paul chooses Timothy as a companion, a member of his community. In his company, he will be sent to Macedonia. In Philippi, Lydia, a rich merchant, and her family welcome the Good News and are baptized.

Reflect: How to choose the right traveling companions? Are you receptive, like Paul, to all the signs that God puts in your life? How do you welcome and listen to people who speak to you of God?

Pray: Thank God for the signs and the people He places on your way. Pray to be enlightened to continue discovering His will in everyday life.

Act: When the opportunity arises, speak well of another person, so as to help that person grow and achieve his or her goals in life. Ask for help from others when needed.

Paul and Silas in prison

¹⁶One day, as we were on our way to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and gained much profit for her owners by her fortune-telling.

¹⁷She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting: “These people are servants of the Most High God. They will make known to you a way of salvation.” ¹⁸The girl did this for several days, until Paul was annoyed. Then he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you, come out of her!” The spirit went out of her that very moment.

¹⁹When her owners realized that all the profits they expected had gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace,

before the local authorities. ²⁰And when they had turned them over to the officials, they said, ²¹“These people are Jews and they are disturbing our city. They have come here to introduce customs which are not lawful for us Romans to adopt or practice.”

²²So they set the crowd against them; and the officials tore the clothes off Paul and Silas and ordered them to be flogged. ²³And after inflicting many blows on them, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to guard them safely. ²⁴Upon receiving these instructions, he threw them into the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

A miraculous deliverance

²⁵About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. ²⁶Suddenly, a severe earthquake shook the place, rocking the prison to its foundations. Immediately, all the doors flew open and the chains of all the prisoners fell off. ²⁷The jailer woke up to see the prison gates wide open. Thinking that the prisoners had escaped, he drew his sword to kill himself, ²⁸but Paul shouted to him, “Do not harm yourself! We are all still here.”

²⁹The jailer asked for a light, then rushed in, and fell at the feet of Paul and Silas. ³⁰After he had secured the other prisoners, he led them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹They answered, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you, and your household, will be saved.” ³²Then they spoke the word of God to him and to all his household.

³³Even at that hour of the night, the jailer took care of them and washed their wounds; and he and his whole household were baptized at once. ³⁴He led them to his house, spread a meal before them and joyfully celebrated with his whole household his new found faith in God.

³⁵The next morning, the officials sent police officers with the order, “Let those men go.” ³⁶So the jailer said to Paul and Silas, “The officials have sent an order for you and Silas to be released. You may leave and go in peace.”

³⁷But Paul said to him, “They flogged us publicly, and jailed us without trial, men who are Roman citizens; and now they want to smuggle us out secretly? Oh no! Let them come themselves and lead us out.”

³⁸The police officers reported this to the officials, who were afraid when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. ³⁹So they

came and apologized to them, took them out and asked them to leave the town.

⁴⁰Once outside the prison, Paul and Silas went to Lydia's house, where they met and encouraged the brothers and sisters, and then departed.

ACTS 16:16-40

Read: Paul and Silas are arrested and punished for "disturbing the city" with the announcement of the Good News. Soon after, with the help of the Lord, they are released, take refuge in the home of Lydia and leave the city.

Reflect: What does the hospitality that Paul and his companions receive, mean? How should you behave in difficult times? To whom should you provide hospitality?

Pray: Pray for the missionaries who are faced with difficulties, and all the prisoners in just or unjust causes. Ask God to be always present in their lives.

Act: Provide hospitality with joy. Embrace people as sent by the Lord himself. If you know a person in prison, visit him/her.

Difficulties in Thessalonica

17¹Paul and Silas took the road through Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. ²As Paul used to do, he went to the synagogue; and on three Sabbaths he held discussions with them about the Scriptures. ³He explained, and proved to them, that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead, and he said, "Such a Messiah is this Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you."

⁴Some of them were convinced and joined Paul and Silas. So too, did a great number of Greeks sympathetic to Judaism, and many prominent women.

⁵This only made the Jews jealous; so they gathered some of the good-for-nothing street loafers and formed a mob to start a riot in the town. They came to the house of Jason, in an attempt to bring Paul and Silas before the people's assembly. ⁶Not finding them there, they dragged off Jason and some believers to the city authorities shouting, "These people

who have turned the world upside down, have come here also, ⁷and Jason has given them hospitality. They all disregard the decrees of the Emperor and claim that there is another King, Jesus.”

⁸In this way, they upset the crowd and the city officials who heard them. ⁹The officials released Jason and the others on bail.

¹⁰As soon as night fell, the believers sent Paul and Silas off to Beroea. On their arrival, they went to the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹Its members were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica and welcomed the message with great enthusiasm. Each day they examined the Scriptures to see if these things were so. ¹²Many of them came to believe, as did numerous influential Greek women and many men as well.

¹³But when the Jews of Thessalonica came to know that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Beroea also, they hurried there to cause a commotion and stir up the crowds. ¹⁴At once, the believers sent Paul away to the coast; but both Silas and Timothy stayed in Beroea. ¹⁵Paul was taken as far as Athens by his escort, who then returned to Beroea with instructions for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible.

ACTS 17:1-15

Read: The mixed responses to the missionary proclamation continue in the journeys to Thessalonica and Beroea. Antagonism toward Paul and Silas escalates, crowds are stirred up, and the missionaries need to depart.

Reflect: Are only religious issues that cause shock and irritate the people? Do you mind if others think, believe or act differently from you? Do you know how to stand firm in your Christian convictions?

Pray: Ask God to help you overcome the feelings that make you act badly toward others, such as envy and anger. Also, ask for strength to compensate for the damage caused.

Act: Approach a person you have offended with your prejudices, with your feelings of envy or anger. Reconcile with her/him.

Paul in Athens

¹⁶While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he felt very uneasy at the sight of a city full of idols. ¹⁷He held discussions in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing people, as well as daily debates in the public square with ordinary passersby.

¹⁸Epicureans and Stoic philosophers debated with him, some of them asking, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others commented, "He sounds like a promoter of foreign gods," because he was heard to speak of Jesus and 'the Resurrection.' ¹⁹So they took Paul and led him off to the Areopagus hall, and said, "We would like to know what this new teaching is that you are talking about. ²⁰Some of the things we hear you say sound strange to us and we would like to know what they mean."

²¹Indeed, all Athenian citizens, as well as the foreigners who live there, have as their favorite occupation talking about or listening to the latest news.

²²Then Paul stood up in the Areopagus hall and said, "Athenian citizens, I note that in every way you are very religious. ²³As I walked around looking at your shrines, I even discovered an altar with this inscription: *To an unknown God*. Now, what you worship as unknown, I intend to make known to you.

²⁴God, who made the world and all that is in it, does not dwell in sanctuaries made by human hands, being as he is Lord of heaven and earth. ²⁵Nor does his worship depend on anything made by human hands, as if he were in need. Rather, it is he who gives life and breath and everything else to everyone. ²⁶From one stock he created the whole human race, to live throughout all the earth, and he fixed the time and the boundaries of each nation. ²⁷He wanted them to seek him by themselves, even if it was only by groping for him, that they succeed in finding him.

Yet, he is not far from any one of us. ²⁸For, in him, we live and move and have our being, as some of your poets have said: *for we, too, are his offspring*. ²⁹If we are indeed God's offspring, we ought not to think of divinity as something like a statue of gold or silver or stone, a product of human art and imagination.

³⁰But now, God prefers to overlook this time of ignorance; and he calls on all people to change their ways. ³¹He has already set a day on which he will judge the world with justice through a man he has appointed. And

so that all may believe it, he has just given a sign, by raising this man from the dead.”

³²When they heard Paul speak of a resurrection from death, some made fun of him, while others said, “We must hear you on this topic some other time.” ³³At that point Paul left. ³⁴But a few did join him, and believed. Among them were Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus court, a woman named Damaris, and some others.

ACTS 17:16-34

Read: In Athens, Paul speaks to the Jews in the synagogue and to the Gentiles in the marketplace. To the latter, he explains that the God of the Jews is the one who created the world and keeps it; he is offering salvation to all through Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.

Reflect: Paul speaks to the Jews and the Gentiles, to each group in their own language and in their context. What is our context today to accept faith? Do we need something more than the reason to believe? What does it mean in our daily life to believe in Jesus, dead and risen, as the savior of the world?

Pray: Pray for a deeper faith, to seek a better understanding of human situations. Give thanks to God for all great and incomprehensible things that He does in life.

Act: Encourage conversations about the relationship that should exist between faith and reason. Do not hesitate to express your doubts of faith with the responsible leaders of your community.

Paul in Corinth

18¹After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ²There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla following a decree of the Emperor Claudius, which ordered all Jews to leave Rome. ³Paul went to visit them and then stayed and worked with them because they shared the same trade of tent making. ⁴Every Sabbath he held discussions in the synagogue, trying to convince both Jews and Greeks.

⁵When Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was able

to give himself wholly to preaching and proving to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. ⁶One day, when they opposed him and insulted him, he shook the dust from his clothes in protest saying, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. I am not to blame if, from now on, I go to the non-Jews.”

⁷So Paul left there and went to the house of a God-fearing man named Titus Justus, who lived next door to the synagogue. ⁸A leading man of the synagogue, Crispus, along with his whole household, believed in the Lord. On hearing Paul, many more Corinthians believed and were baptized.

⁹One night, in a vision, the Lord said to Paul, “Do not be afraid, but continue speaking and do not be silent, ¹⁰for many people in this city are mine. I am with you, so no one will harm you.” ¹¹So Paul stayed a year and a half in that place teaching the word of God among them.

¹²When Gallio was governor of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the court. And they accused him, ¹³“This man tries to persuade us to worship God in ways that are against the law.”

¹⁴Paul was about to speak in his own defense when Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of a misdeed or vicious crime, I would have to consider your complaint. ¹⁵But since this is a quarrel about teachings and divine names that are proper to your own law, see to it yourselves: I refuse to judge such matters.” ¹⁶And he sent them out of the court.

¹⁷Then the people seized Sosthenes, a leading man of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal; but Gallio paid no attention to it.

¹⁸Paul stayed on with the disciples in Corinth for many days; he then left them and sailed off with Priscilla and Aquila for Syria. And as he was no longer under a vow he had taken, he shaved his head before sailing from Cenchreae.

ACTS 18:1-18

Read: Paul’s missionary journeys bring him to Corinth. There he befriends Aquila and Priscilla, Jews who were exiled from Rome. He works with them and announces the Gospel to the Jews and Gentiles.

Reflect: In his missionary activity, Paul takes care of his own

needs. He does not want to be a burden to the community. How do you combine work with the activities of your faith? Does your work allow you to be a witness to the Gospel?

Pray: Ask the Spirit to accompany and guide you in your daily work to enable you to witness your faith in Jesus Christ. Give thanks to the divine omnipresence.

Act: Have Christian attitudes in your work. May this give testimony of your faith.

¹⁹When they reached Ephesus, he left Priscilla and Aquila behind and entered the synagogue to hold discussions with the Jews. ²⁰But although they asked him to stay longer, he declined. ²¹And he took leave of them saying, “God willing, I will come back to you again.” Then he set sail from Ephesus. ²²On landing at Caesarea, he went up to greet the Church, and then went down to Antioch.

²³After spending some time there, he left and traveled from place to place through Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening the disciples.

²⁴A certain Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, arrived at Ephesus. He was an eloquent speaker and an authority on the Scriptures, ²⁵and he had some knowledge of the way of the Lord. With great enthusiasm he preached, and taught correctly about Jesus, although he knew only of John’s baptism. ²⁶As he began to speak boldly in the synagogue, Priscilla and Aquila heard him; so they took him home with them and explained to him the way more accurately. ²⁷As Apollos wished to go to Achaia, the believers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly strengthened those who, by God’s grace, had become believers, ²⁸for he vigorously refuted the Jews proving from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah.

ACTS 18:19-28

Read: Paul returns to Antioch. While in Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila instruct Apollo, versed in Scripture, but he knows little about Jesus Christ. They explain to him “more accurately the way of God” and he becomes a disciple.

Reflect: Are you sufficiently trained in all matters relating to

the Gospel? And among those around you, do you think they need more formation?

Pray: Pray for catechists and religious educators, to be effective in their mission of educating in the faith. Pray also for priests, that in their formation they soak in the Word of God and preach and live happily.

Act: Find time to deepen the knowledge of the Gospel and, if possible, work in the community for the training of its members.

Paul in Ephesus

19¹While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior of the country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples ²whom he asked, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” They answered, “We have not even heard that anyone may receive the Holy Spirit.” ³Paul then asked, “What kind of baptism have you received?” And they answered, “The baptism of John.”

⁴Paul then explained, “John’s baptism was for conversion, but he himself said they should believe in the one who was to come and that one is Jesus.” ⁵Upon hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶Then Paul laid his hands on them and the Holy Spirit came down upon them; and they began to speak in tongues and to prophesy. ⁷There were about twelve of them in all.

⁸Paul went into the synagogue; and for three months he preached and discussed there boldly, trying to convince them about the kingdom of God. ⁹Some of them, instead of believing, grew obstinate, and criticized the way publicly. So Paul departed from them and took the disciples with him. He taught daily in the lecture hall of a certain Tyrannus. ¹⁰He did this for two years, so that all those who lived in the province of Asia, both Jews and non-Jews, heard the word of the Lord.

ACTS 19:1-10

Read: Paul begins his third missionary journey. In Ephesus, he instructs some disciples, to whom he explains the difference between John’s baptism and being baptized in the name of the

Lord Jesus. Paul lays his hands, the Spirit descends on them and they prophesy.

Reflect: What is the value of Baptism for us? Do we feel the presence of the Spirit in our lives and in our community? How does it manifest?

Pray: The Holy Spirit is often the least known person of the Holy Trinity. When you pray, perceive interiorly the movements and signs that the Spirit awakens in you.

Act: Extend your knowledge of the Holy Spirit through readings that deal with him.

¹¹God did extraordinary deeds of power through the hands of Paul. ¹²Even handkerchiefs, or cloths that had touched his skin, were laid upon the sick and their illnesses were cured and evil spirits also departed from them.

¹³Some Jews who traveled around driving out evil spirits also tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus over those possessed by evil spirits, saying, "I command you, by this Jesus whom Paul preaches." ¹⁴Among them were the seven sons of a Jewish priest named Sceva. ¹⁵But one day, when they entered a house and dared to do this, the evil spirit said to them, "Jesus I recognize; and Paul I know; but who are you?" ¹⁶Then the man with the evil spirit sprang at them and overpowered, first, one and then, another. And he handled them so violently that they fled from that house naked and mauled. ¹⁷This became known to all the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus; all of them were very impressed and the name of the Lord Jesus came to be held in great honor.

¹⁸Many of those who had become believers came forward and openly acknowledged their former practices. ¹⁹Many who had practiced magic arts collected their books and burned them in front of everyone. When the value of these was assessed, it came to fifty thousand silver coins.

²⁰In this way, the word of the Lord spread widely and with power.

ACTS 19:11-20

Read: Paul works signs and wonders in the name of Jesus Christ. Some Jewish exorcists try to do the same, but the evil

spirit faced them and left them humiliated. The word of Jesus grew and Paul continues his missionary travels.

Reflect: What is the difference between the way of acting of Paul and that of the exorcists? Can one act in a Christian way without following the example of Jesus Christ? Why?

Pray: Pray to God to grant you the grace to profess and live a coherent faith. That your proclamation of faith in Jesus Christ be revealed in your daily work.

Act: Ask your pastor about any questions you may have about your absolute trust in God. Is it possible to be a Christian and consult the tarot? Is it possible to be a Christian and put all hope on money?

The silversmiths' riot

²¹When all these events were completed, Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, decided to travel through Macedonia and Achaia again; and then go on to Jerusalem. And he said, "After I have been there I must visit Rome also." ²²So he sent two of his assistants, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia ahead of him, while he himself stayed on for a time in Asia.

²³About that time, the city was deeply troubled because of the Way. ²⁴It all began because of a certain silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver models of the temple of the goddess Artemis, and whose business brought a great deal of profit to the workers. ²⁵He called them together with others who did similar work, and said, "Friends, you know that our prosperity depends on this work. ²⁶But as you can see and hear for yourselves, this Paul has led astray a great number of people not only here in Ephesus, but also throughout most of the province of Asia. And he has convinced them that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. ²⁷The danger grows, that not only our trade will be discredited, but even that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will count for nothing. She whom Asia and all the world worships may soon be stripped of her renown."

²⁸On hearing this, they became enraged and began shouting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" ²⁹The uproar spread throughout the whole city. The mob rushed to the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, two Macedonians, who were Paul's traveling companions.

³⁰Paul wished to face this crowd, but the disciples would not let him. ³¹Some of the officials of the Asian province also, who were friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to show himself in the theater.

³²Meanwhile, the whole assembly was in an uproar. Some shouted one thing, and some shouted another; and most of them did not know why they were there. ³³Some of the crowd wanted a certain Alexander to speak, whom the Jews put forward. Alexander intended to make a speech of defense before the crowd, ³⁴but when they recognized that he was a Jew, they chanted all together for about two hours, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

³⁵Finally, the town clerk was able to calm the mob. He said, "Citizens of Ephesus, who does not know that Ephesus is keeper of the temple of the great Artemis, and of her image which fell from the sky? ³⁶Since these things are undeniable, you must calm yourselves and do nothing rash. ³⁷These men whom you brought here are not temple-robbers, nor have they spoken ill of our goddess. ³⁸If Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen want to bring charges against anyone, the courts are open and there are officials. Let them bring charges against each other. ³⁹If there is anything further that needs to be investigated, let it be done in the lawful assembly. ⁴⁰For, as it is today, we are in danger of being charged with rioting, since there is no valid excuse we can give for this wild demonstration." ⁴¹And the town clerk dismissed the assembly.

ACTS 19:21-41

Read: Paul's preaching does not stop despite the discomfort it generates among the great traders of pagan worship. Following this, a riot in Ephesus happens, which is solved by appealing to common sense.

Reflect: Is your practice of faith consistent with the Gospel? How important is money in your life? Does it weigh more than the other aspects of your Christian life? Do you think it is right? Why?

Pray: Ask forgiveness for the times you have put economic interests ahead of the interests of the Gospel. Ask for light and generosity to prioritize the most important thing.

Act: When making a purchase, consider not only the item's price but also fair business practices. Please also note that those who make this product should receive a fair wage for their work.

Paul returns to Macedonia

20¹After the uproar died down, Paul called his disciples together to encourage them. Then he said goodbye and set out on his journey to Macedonia. ²He traveled throughout those regions and spent himself in speaking and encouraging them. He finally arrived in Greece.

³When he had been there for three months, he wanted to set sail for Syria; but as the Jews were plotting against him, he decided to return by way of Macedonia. ⁴When he was about to leave for the Asian province, some companions went with him: Sopater, son of Pyrrhus, from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy, Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia. ⁵So they went ahead and waited for us in Troas, ⁶while we set sail from Philippi as soon as the festival of Unleavened Bread was over. Five days later, we joined them in Troas, where we spent a week.

The Eucharist at Troas

⁷On the first day of the week we were together for the breaking of the bread, and Paul, who intended to leave the following day, spoke at length. The discourse went on until midnight, ⁸with many lamps burning in the upstairs room where we were gathered. A young man named Eutychius was sitting on the window ledge ⁹and as Paul kept on talking, Eutychius grew more and more sleepy until he finally went sound asleep and fell from the third floor to the ground. There they found him dead.

¹⁰Paul went down, bent over him and took him in his arms. "Do not be alarmed," he said, "there is life in him." ¹¹Then he went back upstairs, broke the bread and ate. After that, he kept on talking with them for a long time until daybreak, and then he left. ¹²As for the young man, they lifted him up alive and were greatly comforted.

¹³We went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos, where we were to pick up Paul. This was the arrangement, since Paul intended to travel

by foot. ¹⁴In fact, we met him at Assos and, taking him aboard, we went on to Mitylene. ¹⁵We sailed from there and arrived off Chios the next day. A day later, we came to Samos; and the following day, we reached Miletus.

¹⁶Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so as not to lose time in Asia, for he was eager to reach Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost, if at all possible.

Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders

¹⁷From Miletus, Paul sent word to Ephesus summoning the elders of the Church. ¹⁸When they came to him, he addressed them, "You know how I lived among you, from the first day I set foot in the province of Asia; ¹⁹how I served the Lord in humility through the sorrows and trials that the Jews caused me. ²⁰You know that I never held back from doing anything that could be useful for you; I spoke publicly and in your homes; ²¹and I urged Jews and non-Jews alike, to turn to God and believe in our Lord Jesus.

²²But now I am going to Jerusalem, chained by the Spirit, without knowing what will happen to me there. ²³Yet in every city, the Holy Spirit warns me that imprisonment and troubles await me. ²⁴Indeed, I put no value on my life; if only I can finish my race; and complete the service to which I have been assigned by the Lord Jesus to announce the good news of God's grace.

²⁵I now feel sure that none of you, among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom of God, will ever see me again. ²⁶Therefore, I declare to you this day that my conscience is clear with regard to all of you. ²⁷For I have spared no effort in fully declaring to you God's will.

²⁸Keep watch over yourselves and over the whole flock the Holy Spirit has placed into your care. Shepherd the Church of the Lord that he has won at the price of his own blood. ²⁹I know that after I leave ruthless wolves will come among you and not spare the flock. ³⁰And from among you some will arise corrupting the truth, and inducing the disciples to follow them.

³¹Be on the watch, therefore, remembering that for three years, night and day, I did not cease to warn everyone even with tears. ³²Now I commend you to God and to his grace-filled word, which is able to make you grow and gain the inheritance that you shall share with all the saints.

³³I have not looked for anyone's silver, gold or clothing. ³⁴You, yourselves, know that these hands of mine have provided for both my needs and the needs of those who were with me. ³⁵In every way I have shown you that by working hard one must help the weak, remembering the words that the Lord Jesus himself said, 'Happiness lies more in giving than in receiving.'

³⁶After this discourse, Paul knelt down with them and prayed. ³⁷Then they all began to weep and threw their arms around him and kissed him. ³⁸They were deeply distressed because he had said that they would never see him again. And they went with him even to the ship.

ACTS 20:1-38

Read: Paul leaves Ephesus and departs for Macedonia and Greece. From Miletus he sends a very emotional message to the leaders of the church of Ephesus, reminding them that all Christians should be prepared to overcome the difficulties associated with the proclamation of the Gospel.

Reflect: How is Paul's commitment and affection for the community of Ephesus perceived? How are you preparing yourself for your future? How do you collaborate with your community?

Pray: Remember with gratitude those who have played an important role in your life. Ask the Lord to continue sending leaders and collaborators committed to the cause of the Gospel.

Act: Express your gratitude to people who have had or have a role in your Christian life.

On to Jerusalem

21 ¹When we had finally taken leave of them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes; and from there, to Patara. ²There we found a ship that made for Phoenicia; we went aboard and set sail. ³We caught sight of Cyprus but passed it by on our left as we continued on towards Syria. We landed at Tyre where the ship had to unload cargo. ⁴There we found the disciples and stayed a week. Warned by the Spirit, they told Paul not to go to Jerusalem.

⁵But when it was time, we departed and continued on our journey. All of them, wives and children included, came out of the city with us and,

on the beach, we knelt down and prayed. ⁶After that we said good-bye to one another; we boarded the ship and they returned home.

⁷We continued our journey, sailing from Tyre to Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and spent a day with them. ⁸On the following day, we left and came to Caesarea. There we entered the house of Philip, the evangelist; and we stayed with him. He was one of the Seven; ⁹and had four unmarried daughters who were gifted with prophecy.

¹⁰We were there some days, when a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands with it saying, ¹¹"Thus speaks the Holy Spirit: 'This is how the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and hand him over to the foreign power.'"

¹²When we heard this, we, together with these people of Caesarea, begged Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³Then he answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

¹⁴When he would not be persuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

¹⁵After this we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁶With us were some of the disciples of Caesarea who brought us to the house of a Cypriot, where we were to stay. He was called Mnason and was one of the early disciples.

Paul is received by the Church of Jerusalem

¹⁷When we arrived in Jerusalem the brothers welcomed us warmly. ¹⁸The next day, Paul went with us to James' house where all the elders had gathered. ¹⁹After greeting them, Paul began telling them in detail everything God had done among the non-Jews, through his ministry.

²⁰After hearing this, they all praised God; but they said, "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews of Judea have come to believe and all of them are zealous for the law. ²¹Yet they have heard that you teach the Jews who live in pagan nations to depart from Moses, telling them not to have their sons circumcised and to renounce Jewish customs. ²²We shall gather the assembly for, in any case, they will hear that you have arrived. ²³Then, do as we tell you.

There are four men among us who have made a vow. ²⁴Take them and

purify yourself along with them, and pay the sacrifice for them to shave their heads. In that way, everyone will know that there is nothing true in what they have been told about you; but that, you go on keeping the law.

²⁵As for the non-Jews who have become believers, we sent them a letter to tell them, that they are only obliged not to eat meat offered to idols, or blood, or flesh of strangled animals; and also to avoid prohibited sexual union.”

²⁶So the next day, Paul took the men; together with them, he purified himself and entered the temple to give notice of what day the sacrifice would be offered for each of them to end his time of purification.

ACTS 21:1-26

Read: Paul and his disciples travel to Jerusalem. They know it's a dangerous journey but Paul is determined to continue. In Jerusalem, the Church recommends Paul to follow the Jewish customs to avoid scandal with the Jews.

Reflect: What do you think of the suggestion made by the Church of Jerusalem to Paul? Do you think Paul betrays his convictions? Did you ever find yourself in that situation? What did you do? Had the common good outweighed your own interests?

Pray: Give thanks for the presence of the Christian community in your life, and ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom and humility, for placing the common good ahead of your own.

Act: Learn to trust the decisions of the community, though contrary to your personal opinion. Offer unconditional support to the leaders and promoters of those decisions.

Paul is arrested in the temple

²⁷When the seven days were almost over, some Jews from Asia who saw Paul in the temple began to stir up the whole crowd. They seized him, ²⁸shouting, “Fellow Israelites, help! This is the man who is spreading his teaching everywhere against our people, our law and this Sanctuary. And now he has even brought non-Jews into the temple area, defiling this Holy Place.” ²⁹For they thought they had seen him in the city with Trophimus, a Greek man from Ephesus, and they supposed that Paul had introduced him into the temple.

³⁰Then turmoil spread through the whole city. People came running from all sides. They seized Paul and dragged him outside the temple. At once, the gates were shut.

³¹They would have killed him, had not a report reached the commander of the Roman troops that all of Jerusalem was rioting. ³²At once the commander took some officers and soldiers and rushed down to the crowd.

When they saw the commander and the soldiers, the crowd stopped beating Paul. ³³The commander went over to Paul, arrested him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains; then he inquired who he was and what he had done. ³⁴But some in the crowd shouted one thing and others another. As the commander was unable to find out the facts because of the uproar, he ordered Paul to be brought to the fortress. ³⁵When Paul reached the steps, he actually had to be carried up by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob, ³⁶for a multitude of people followed shouting, “Kill him!”

³⁷Just as he was about to be taken inside, Paul said to the commander, “May I say something to you?” He replied, “So you speak Greek! ³⁸Are you not the Egyptian, then, who caused a riot some time ago and led a band of four thousand terrorists out into the desert?” Paul answered, ³⁹“I am a Jew, a citizen of Tarsus, a well-known city in Cilicia. I beg you, let me address these people.”

The commander agreed. ⁴⁰So Paul, standing on the steps, motioned to the people with his hand and, when they were silent, he began to speak to them in Hebrew.

ACTS 21:27-40

Read: Paul goes to the temple in Jerusalem following the advice of the community. The Jews accuse him of desecrating the temple and try to lynch him. The soldiers save him, and Paul decides to talk to the people.

Reflect: Have you ever felt rejected because of your faith? How have you reacted?

Pray: Ask for strength that your deeds be faithful to the will of God, knowing that it can bring rejection and misunderstanding.

Act: Be consistent with the mission you have received, even if that does not entail applause and recognition.

Paul addresses the Jews

22¹“Brothers and fathers, listen to what I have to say to you in my defense.” ²When they heard him speaking to them in Hebrew, they became more quiet. So he went on.

³“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up here in this city, where I was educated in the school of Gamaliel, according to the strict observance of our law. And I was dedicated to God’s service, as are all of you today. ⁴As for this Way, I persecuted it to the point of death and arrested its followers, both men and women, throwing them into prison.

⁵The High Priest and the whole Council of elders can bear witness to this. From them, I received letters for the Jewish brothers in Damascus; and I set out to arrest those who were there, and bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment. ⁶But, as I was traveling along, nearing Damascus at about noon, a great light from the sky suddenly flashed about me. ⁷I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me: ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ ⁸I answered: ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said to me: ‘I am Jesus, the Nazorean, whom you persecute.’ ⁹The men who were with me saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. ¹⁰I asked: ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord replied: ‘Get up and go to Damascus; there, you will be told all that you are destined to do.’ ¹¹Yet, the brightness of that light had blinded me; and so I was led by the hand into Damascus by my companions.

¹²There, a certain Ananias came to me. He was a devout observer of the law and well spoken of by all the Jews who were living there. ¹³As he stood by me, he said: ‘Brother Saul, recover your sight.’ At that moment, I could see; and I looked at him. ¹⁴He then said, ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Just One, and to hear the words from his mouth. ¹⁵From now on you shall be his witness before all the pagan people and tell them all that you have seen and heard. ¹⁶And now, why delay? Get up and be baptized; and have your sins washed away by calling upon his Name.’

¹⁷On my return to Jerusalem, I was praying in the temple when I fell into a trance ¹⁸and saw him. He spoke to me: ‘Get ready to leave Jerusalem without delay, because they will not accept your testimony about me.’ ¹⁹I answered: ‘Lord, they know well that I imprisoned those who believed in you and had them beaten in every synagogue; ²⁰and,

while the blood of your witness Stephen was being poured out, I stood by and approved it and even guarded the cloaks of his murderers.’²¹ Then he said to me: ‘Go, for I am sending you far away, to the pagan nations.’”

²²Up to this point the crowd listened to Paul, but on hearing the last words, they began to shout, “Kill him! He does not deserve to live!”²³They were screaming and waving their cloaks and throwing dust into the air. ²⁴So the commander ordered Paul to be brought inside the fortress and questioned, after flogging, to find out why they made such an outcry against him.

²⁵But when the soldiers had strapped him down, Paul said to the officer standing there, “Is it legal to flog a Roman citizen without a trial?”

²⁶On hearing this, the officer went to the commander and said, “What are you doing? That man is a Roman citizen.”²⁷So the commander came and asked him, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?” “Yes,” answered Paul.²⁸The commander then said, “It cost me a large sum of money to become a Roman citizen.” Paul answered, “I am one by birth.”

²⁹Then those who were about to question him backed away; and the commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put a Roman citizen in chains.

Paul appears before the Sanhedrin

³⁰The next day, the commander wanted to know for certain the charges the Jews were making against Paul. So, he released him from prison and called together the High Priest and the whole Council; and they brought Paul down and made him stand before them.

ACTS 22:1-30

Read: Paul explains to the Jews of Jerusalem how his conversion was and why he began to preach to the Gentiles. The Jews reject him and try to kill him again.

Reflect: Why does Paul use as a defense the story of his conversion? Is your witness of life also a testimony of faith to others?

Pray: Give thanks for God’s presence in your life. Always put your life into God’s hands, especially in times of difficulty.

Act: Tell or write your Christian life story and share it with someone whom you think can do well with it in his/her journey of faith.

23¹Paul looked directly at the Council and said, “Brothers, to this day I have lived my life with a clear conscience before God.”²At that, the High Priest Ananias ordered his attendants to strike him on the mouth.³Then Paul said, “God is about to strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law and you break the law by ordering me to be struck!”⁴At this, the attendants protested, “How dare you insult God’s High Priest!”⁵Paul answered, “Brothers, I did not know that he was the High Priest. For Scripture says: *You shall not curse the ruler of your people.*”

⁶Paul knew, that part of the Council were Sadducees and others Pharisees; so he spoke out in the Council, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, son of a Pharisee. It is for the hope in the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial here.”

⁷At these words, an argument broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the whole assembly was divided.⁸For the Sadducees claim that there are neither resurrection, nor angels nor spirits; while the Pharisees acknowledge all these things.

⁹Then the shouting grew louder; and some teachers of the law of the Pharisee party protested, “We find nothing wrong with this man. Maybe a spirit or an angel has spoken to him.”

¹⁰With this, the argument became so violent that the commander feared that Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He, therefore, ordered the soldiers to go down and rescue him from their midst, and take him back to the fortress.

¹¹That night, the Lord stood by Paul and said, “Courage! As you have borne witness to me here in Jerusalem, so must you do in Rome.”

ACTS 23:1-11

Read: Paul defends himself before the Grand Council of the Jews. Cleverly takes advantage of the division of the Council to vindicate his faith and be free.

Reflect: What is your biggest motivation to bear witness to Christ? What does the expression “be wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Mt 10:16) suggest to you?

Pray: Present to the Lord any fear, difficulty or challenges you are facing right now, and ask for courage and skill to address it.

Ask also the ability of Paul to proclaim the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Act: Find effective strategies to proclaim Jesus Christ in every moment of your life. Share this reflection with the priest or another leader in your community.

The plot to kill Paul

¹²When it was day, certain Jews formed a conspiracy. They bound themselves by an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul.

¹³There were more than forty of them who joined in this conspiracy.

¹⁴They went to the high priests and the elders and said, “We have bound ourselves by oath not to taste food until we have killed Paul.

¹⁵Now then, it is up to you and the Council together, to convince the Roman commander to bring him down to you on the pretext that you want to investigate his case more thoroughly. We, for our part, are prepared to kill him before he gets there.”

¹⁶But the son of Paul’s sister heard about the planned ambush. So he went to the headquarters and informed Paul. ¹⁷Paul sent for one of the officers and said, “Take this young man to the commander for he has something to report to him.” ¹⁸So the officer took him and brought him to the commander saying, “The prisoner, Paul, called me and asked me to bring this boy to you, because he has something to tell you.”

¹⁹The commander took him by the hand and, drawing him aside, asked him privately, “What is it that you have to report to me?” ²⁰The boy replied, “The Jews have agreed among themselves to ask you tomorrow to have Paul brought down to the Council, as if to inquire more thoroughly about him. ²¹But do not be persuaded by them, for there are more than forty of them ready to ambush him having bound themselves by an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are now ready to do it and are awaiting your decision.” ²²The commander let the boy go with this advice, “Do not tell anyone that you gave me this information.”

Paul is transferred to Caesarea

²³Then the commander summoned two of his officers and said to them, “Get ready to leave for Caesarea by nine o’clock tonight with two

hundred infantrymen, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen. ²⁴Provide horses also for Paul to ride; so that he may be brought safely to Felix, the governor.”

²⁵He then wrote the governor a letter to this effect:

²⁶“Claudius Lysias greets the Most Excellent Governor Felix, and communicates to him the following: ²⁷The Jews had arrested this man and were about to kill him when I intervened with my troops and took him out of their hands, since I knew he was a Roman citizen. ²⁸As I wanted to know what charge they had against him, I presented him before the Sanhedrin; ²⁹and I discovered that the accusation related to matters of their law; but there was nothing that deserved death or imprisonment. ³⁰When I was informed that the Jews had prepared a plot against this man, I decided to send him to you and told his accusers to present their complaints before you. Farewell.”

³¹The soldiers acted in accordance with these instructions. They took Paul and brought him to Antipatris by night. ³²On the following day, they returned to the fortress, but the horsemen continued journeying with him. ³³Upon entering Caesarea, they handed the letter to the governor and presented Paul to him. ³⁴When Felix had read the letter, he asked Paul from which province he was; and when he learned that Paul was from Cilicia, ³⁵he said to him: “I shall hear your accusers when they come.” And he ordered that he be kept in custody in the palace of Herod.

ACTS 23:12-35

Read: Paul’s nephew intervenes to save his uncle from a new assassination attempt on the part of the Jews. Soldiers defend Paul and transfer him safely to Caesarea.

Reflect: Can one be a Christian without suffering rejection and persecution? Why? What difficulties do you face in your life of faith? Is it easy to be a Christian today?

Pray: Ask the Lord for strength to bear witness to the Gospel even amid difficulties.

Act: Follow the example of Paul’s nephew, and support the cause of the persecuted and unjustly accused.

The case before Felix

24¹After five days, Ananias the High Priest, came down to Caesarea with some of the elders, and a lawyer named Tertullus. And they presented their case against Paul before the governor. ²Paul was called in and Tertullus accused him in this way:

³“Most Excellent Felix, thanks to you—your labors and your wise reforms—our people now enjoy great peace. We accept all this in every way and in every place, and we are totally grateful to you. ⁴So as not to take more of your time, I beg you to listen briefly to us, with your usual kindness. ⁵We have found that this man is a pest, he creates division among the Jews throughout the world and is a leader of the Nazorene sect. ⁶He even tried to profane the temple. So we seized him. We would have judged him according to our law, ⁷but Lysias, the commandant, intervened in a very violent way and took him from us. ⁸Then he declared that his accusers must present themselves before you. By examining him yourself, you will learn from him about all that we accuse him of.”

⁹The Jews confirmed this, firmly maintaining that all this was so.

¹⁰Then the governor motioned to Paul, who said:

“As I know that you have administered this nation for many years, I make my defense with much confidence. ¹¹You, yourself, can ascertain that not more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship; ¹²and that they did not find me disputing with anyone, or inciting the people, either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city. ¹³So they cannot prove the things of which they now accuse me.

¹⁴But this I admit before you, that I serve the God of our ancestors, according to the Way that they call a sect. I believe everything written in the law and in the prophets; ¹⁵and I have the same hope in God that they have: that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both the good and the sinners. ¹⁶So I strive always to have a clear conscience before God and before people.

¹⁷After many years, I came to bring help to those of my nation and to offer sacrifices. ¹⁸On that occasion, they found me in the temple; I had been purified, according to the law, and there was no crowd or commotion. Yet, all began with some Jews from Asia, ¹⁹who ought to be here before you to accuse me if they have anything against me. ²⁰Let these men say what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin;

²¹ unless it was for having declared in a loud voice, when I was before them: “Today, I am being judged on account of the resurrection of the dead.”

²² Felix, who was well informed about the Way, postponed the case, and said to them, “When the commandant, Lysias, comes down, I will examine the case thoroughly.” ²³ So he ordered the captain to keep Paul under guard, giving him a certain liberty and without preventing his friends from attending to him.

²⁴ After some days, Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jew. He sent for Paul and let him speak about faith in Christ. ²⁵ But when Paul spoke about justice, self-control and the future judgment, Felix was frightened, and he said to him: “You may leave now; I shall send for you some other time.” ²⁶ Felix was hoping that Paul would give him money, so he sent for him often and conversed with him.

²⁷ Two years passed and Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and as Felix wanted to remain on good terms with the Jews, he left Paul in prison.

ACTS 24:1-27

Read: Paul is placed on trial before Felix, the governor. During his defense, he retells everything that happened since his arrival in Jerusalem and declared himself a Christian, believing in God and a man of peace. But Felix, who expects to receive money from Paul, lengthens the trial for two years more.

Reflect: How does Paul defend himself at the trial? How should Christians act with attitudes like that of Felix? Should we promote or denounce corruption? Is it easy to act consistently?

Pray: Ask for the help of the Holy Spirit in those moments when it is difficult to give Christian witness. Pray for Christians, that by our actions, we can eradicate corruption from our society.

Act: Be consistent with the Gospel message: promoting peace, forgiveness, justice, consistency, love, and faith among your people.

The trial before Festus

25¹Three days after Festus arrived in the province, he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem. ²There, the chief priests and the elders accused Paul again. ³In a very hypocritical way they asked, as a favor from Festus, that Paul be brought to Jerusalem; but they were planning to kill him on the way. ⁴Festus answered, that Paul was under custody in Caesarea and, as he, himself, had to go there shortly, he added, ⁵“Let those of you, who have the authority go down with me to Caesarea; and if this man has done anything wrong, let them accuse him.”

⁶Festus did not stay in Jerusalem for more than eight or ten days and then he went to Caesarea. The next day, he took his seat on the tribunal and sent for Paul. ⁷When Paul arrived, the Jews who came from Jerusalem stood around him, and presented many serious charges that they could not prove. ⁸Paul defended himself from all these, saying, “I have not committed any offense against the law of the Jews, or against the temple or against Caesar.”

⁹Then Festus, who wanted to please the Jews, asked Paul: “Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem to be tried before me?” ¹⁰Paul answered, “I am on trial before Caesar’s tribunal; here I have to be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews: you, yourself, know this very well. ¹¹If I have committed any crime, which deserves death, I accept death. But if I have not done anything of which they accuse me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.”

¹²So Festus, after conferring with his council, answered, “You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar, you shall go.”

ACTS 25:1-12

Read: Festus replaces Felix as governor. To curry favor with the Jews, he tries that Paul stands trial in Jerusalem, but he, as a Roman citizen, asks to be judged by the emperor.

Reflect: Paul identifies himself as a Christian believer and as a Roman citizen. How do these two identities relate among themselves? Should a Christian participate in the political life of society? How?

Pray: Pray to the Holy Spirit for strength, like Paul, and be firm in your convictions, that your Christian life be leaven in the transformation of society.

Act: Watch for social and political events around you. Be a responsible citizen and participate, from your Christian values in the political process to enact laws that are increasingly similar to the Gospel values.

¹³Some days later, King Agrippa and his sister Bernice, arrived in Caesarea to greet Festus. As they were to stay there several days, Festus told the king about Paul's case and said to him,

¹⁴"We have here a man whom Felix left as a prisoner. ¹⁵When I was in Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews accused him, and asked me to sentence him. ¹⁶I told them that it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over a man without giving him an opportunity to defend himself in front of his accusers. ¹⁷So they came, and I took my seat without delay on the tribunal and sent for the man.

¹⁸When the accusers had the floor, they did not accuse him of any of the crimes that I was led to think he had committed; ¹⁹instead, they quarreled with him about religion and about a certain Jesus, who has died but whom Paul asserted to be alive. ²⁰I did not know what to do about this case, so I asked Paul if he wanted to go to Jerusalem to be tried there. ²¹But Paul appealed to be judged by the emperor. So I ordered that he be kept in custody until I send him to Caesar." ²²Agrippa said to Festus: "I would like to hear that man." Festus answered him: "Tomorrow, you shall."

²³On the following day, Agrippa and Bernice arrived, with great ceremony and entered the audience hall with the commanders and the elders of the city. Festus ordered that Paul be brought in and said:

²⁴"King Agrippa, and all here present; here you see this man, about whom the whole community of the Jews came to see me in Jerusalem, as well as here, protesting loudly that he must not live. ²⁵I, for my part, am convinced that he has not done anything that deserves death. But, after he appealed to be judged by the emperor, I decided to send him on. ²⁶Well, if I have no definite information, what can I write to Caesar about him? Therefore, I present him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, that you may examine him, and that I may know what to write. ²⁷For it seems absurd to me to send a prisoner without indicating the charges against him."

Paul's speech before King Agrippa

26¹ Agrippa said to Paul: "You may speak in your own defense." So Paul stretched out his hand and began in this way:

²"King Agrippa, you have just heard about the accusations of the Jews. I consider myself fortunate in having the opportunity to defend myself against all this before you today; ³for you are an expert in the customs of the Jews and their disputes. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

⁴All the Jews know how I have lived from my youth; how I have lived among my own people and in Jerusalem. ⁵They have always known me; and they can tell you, if they wish, that I have lived as a Pharisee in the most rigorous sect of our religion. ⁶If I am now tried here, it is because of the hope I have in the promise made by God to our ancestors. ⁷The hope of attaining this promise is behind the fervent worship that our twelve tribes render to God night and day. Yet now, O king, the Jews accuse me for this hope! ⁸But why refuse to believe that God raises the dead?

⁹I myself, in the beginning, thought that I had to use all possible means to counteract the Name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰This I did in Jerusalem; and with the authorization of the chief priests, I put in prison many who believed; and I cast my vote when they were condemned to death.

¹¹I went round the synagogues and multiplied punishments against them to force them to renounce their faith; such was my rage against them that I pursued them, even to foreign cities.

¹²With this purpose in mind, I went to Damascus with full authority and commissioned by the chief priests. ¹³On the way, O king, at midday, I saw a light from heaven, more brilliant than the sun that dazzled me and those who accompanied me. ¹⁴We all fell to the ground; and I heard a voice saying to me in Hebrew: 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? In vain do you kick against the goad.'

¹⁵I answered: 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said: 'I am Jesus, whom you persecute. ¹⁶Get up now, and stand on your feet. I have revealed myself to you, to make you servant and witness to what I have just shown you and to what I will show you later on. ¹⁷I will rescue you from all evil that may come from your own people, or from the pagans, to whom I am sending you. ¹⁸For you shall open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God;

and, through faith in me, may obtain forgiveness of their sins and a place among those who are sanctified.’

¹⁹Since that time, King Agrippa, I did not stray from this heavenly vision; ²⁰on the contrary, I began preaching; first, to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and throughout Judea; and then to the pagan nations that they should repent, and turn to God showing the fruits of true conversion. ²¹I was carrying out this mission, when the Jews arrested me in the temple and tried to kill me. But, with the help of God, I still stand here, today, to give my testimony, both to the great and the small.

²²I do not teach anything other than what Moses and the prophets announced beforehand: ²³the Messiah had to die; and after being the first to be raised from the dead, he would proclaim the light to his people, as well as to all nations.”

²⁴As Paul came to this point of his defense, Festus said in a loud voice: “Paul, you are mad; your great learning has deranged your mind!” ²⁵But Paul answered: “I am not mad, Most Excellent Festus, but everything I have said is reliable and true. ²⁶The king is acquainted with all these things, so to him I speak with such confidence. I am convinced that he knows everything about this case, for these things did not happen in a dark corner. ²⁷King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do.”

²⁸Agrippa said to him: “You almost believe that you have already made me a Christian!” ²⁹Paul answered him: “Whether little or more, I would that not only you, but all who hear me this day, may come to be as I am—except for these chains.”

³⁰Then the king rose and, with him the governor, Bernice and all the attendants. ³¹When they went out, they talked among themselves and said: “This man has done nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.” ³²And Agrippa said to Festus: “Had he not appealed to Caesar, he could have been set free.”

ACTS 25:13—26:32

Read: Festus invites King Agrippa to hear the case of Paul, who recounts his conversion. He makes sure that all he announces is the realization of the promise that the Jews expected: Jesus Christ. But the Jews do not accept his word.

Reflect: Paul is a missionary in every moment of his life. Do you follow his example or your faith life takes a different level in everyday life? What things cause you to stay away from your Christian convictions?

Pray: Ask forgiveness for your possible inconsistencies with faith. Ask for light to recognize the action of God in your life and the courage to express it in any circumstance.

Act: A Christian cannot bracket the faith he or she professes. Be consistent, like Paul, in all aspects of your life.

Departure for Rome

27¹When it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they handed over Paul and the other prisoners into the care of an officer of the Augustan battalion named Julius. ²We boarded a ship of Adramyttium, bound for the Asian coasts, and we left, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from the city of Thessalonica. ³We arrived at Sidon on the next day. Julius was very kind to Paul, letting him visit his friends and be cared for by them. ⁴From there, we sailed along the sheltered coast of Cyprus because the winds were against us. ⁵We sailed across the seas off Cilicia and Pamphylia and arrived at Myra, in Lycia. ⁶There, the captain found a ship from Alexandria sailing for Italy, and made us board it.

⁷We sailed slowly for several days, and arrived with great difficulty at Cnidus. As the wind did not allow us to enter that port, we sailed for the shelter of Crete with the Cape of Salmone within sight. ⁸We turned with difficulty and arrived at a place called Good Ports, near the city of Lasea.

⁹Time passed, and the crossing began to be dangerous: we had already celebrated the feast of the Fast. ¹⁰Then Paul said to them: "Friends, I believe that it would not be very wise to proceed with our crossing for we could lose not only the cargo and the ship, but also our lives." ¹¹But the Roman officer relied more on the ship's captain, and the owner of the ship than on the words of Paul. ¹²And, as the port was not suitable for wintering, the majority agreed to set out from there in the hope of reaching the harbor of Crete called Phoenix, overlooking Africa and Choros, where they could spend the winter.

Storm and shipwreck

¹³Then the south wind began to blow; and they thought that they had gained their purpose; they weighed anchor and sailed along the island of Crete. ¹⁴But a little later, a strong wind called “the northeaster” swept down on them from across the island. ¹⁵The ship was dragged along and could not face the wind, so that we remained adrift.

¹⁶As we were crossing under the lee of the small island of Cauda, we managed—but with effort—to secure the lifeboat. ¹⁷After lifting it aboard, they used cables to undergird the hull, and since we feared running aground on the sands of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor. So we continued to be dragged along.

¹⁸The storm lashed at us so strongly that on the next day they began throwing the cargo overboard. ¹⁹On the third day, the sailors, with their own hands, threw out the ship’s gear. ²⁰For several days, neither the sun nor the stars could be seen and the tempest had not subsided: we lost all hope of saving ourselves.

²¹As we had not eaten for days, Paul stood up among them and said: “Friends, if you had followed my advice when I told you not to set sail from Crete, we would not be in such danger now and we could have avoided this loss. ²²But now I invite you to regain courage, for no one among you shall die; only the ship shall be destroyed. ²³Last night, there appeared to me an angel of my God whom I serve ²⁴and he said to me: ‘Paul, do not be afraid, you must present yourself before Caesar’s tribunal; and God has guaranteed you the life of all those who sail with you.’

²⁵Have courage, therefore, my friends, for I trust in God that it will be just as he told me. ²⁶But we have to run aground on some island.”

²⁷Near midnight, on the fourteenth night, as we were drifting in the Adriatic Sea, the sailors suspected that land was near. ²⁸They measured the depth of the water and it was thirty-seven meters. After a while, they measured it again and it was twenty-seven meters. ²⁹They feared that we might hit some rocks, so they cast out four anchors from the stern and waited anxiously for morning. ³⁰Then the sailors tried to escape from the ship, under the pretext of extending the cables of the anchors from the bow; so they lowered the lifeboat into the sea. ³¹But Paul said to the captain, and to the soldiers: “If they leave the ship, you cannot be saved.” ³²So the soldiers cut the mooring cables of the boat and let it fall.

³³As they waited for dawn, Paul urged everyone: “For fourteen days you have not eaten anything because of anxious waiting. ³⁴I ask you to eat now if you want to live; be sure that not even a hair of your head will be lost.” ³⁵Having said this, he took bread, gave thanks to God in everybody’s presence, broke it and began to eat. ³⁶All were encouraged and they too ate. ³⁷They were two hundred and seventy-six persons in all. ³⁸When they had eaten enough, they threw the wheat into the sea to lighten the boat.

³⁹When morning came, they did not recognize the land, but noticed a bay with a beach; so they decided to run the ship aground, if possible. ⁴⁰They cast off the anchors and left them in the sea; at the same time, they loosened the ropes of the rudders, hoisted the foresail to the wind and headed for the beach. ⁴¹But they struck a sandbank and the ship ran aground. The bow stuck and was immovable, while the stern was broken up by the violent waves.

⁴²The soldiers then planned to kill the prisoners, for fear that some of them might escape by swimming. ⁴³But the captain, who wished to save Paul, did not allow them to do this. He ordered those who knew how to swim to be the first to jump into the water and head for the shore, ⁴⁴and the rest to hold on to planks or pieces of the ship. So all of us reached land safe and sound.

ACTS 27:1-44

Read: Paul departs by sea to Rome to be tried by the emperor. On the way, the ship sinks, but he is confident at all times that divine providence will save them.

Reflect: What good does Paul get from the heavy storm? What storms shake your life and how do you take advantage of them to grow in faith? Do you trust in God’s providence?

Pray: As hard as it is, give thanks to God for the storms in your life. Trust that something positive will come out of them.

Act: Be optimistic about the next difficulty you will face. Thank God for every moment of your life, even if all you can offer is a short and simple prayer.

On Malta

28¹After being saved, we learned that the island was called Malta. ²The natives were very cordial. They lit a big bonfire and took good care of us all, since it was raining and cold.

³Paul gathered a bundle of dried twigs; and as he threw them into the fire, a viper suddenly came out, because of the heat, and entwined itself around his hand. ⁴When the natives saw the viper hanging from his hand, they said to one another: "Surely this man is a murderer: he has barely escaped from the raging sea, yet divine justice will not allow him to live." ⁵But Paul shook off the viper into the fire and did not suffer any harm. They waited to see him swell and die; ⁶but after observing him for a while, they saw that nothing happened to him; so they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god.

⁷Near this place was an estate owned by the head of the island, named Publius. For three days this man welcomed us hospitably. ⁸It so happened that his father was in bed with fever and dysentery. Paul went to see him; he prayed and laid his hands on him and healed him. ⁹Because of this, the rest of the sick people on the island came to see him and were cured. ¹⁰So they showered us with kindness, and on our departure, they provided us with everything we needed.

From Malta to Rome

¹¹After three months, we boarded a ship that had spent the winter at the island. It belonged to an Alexandrian company and carried the figurehead of Castor and Pollux as insignia. ¹²We sailed for Syracuse, staying there for three days; ¹³and after circling the coast, we arrived at Rhegium. On the following day, a south wind began to blow, and at the end of two days we arrived at Puteoli, ¹⁴where we found some of our brothers, who invited us to stay with them for a week. And that was how we came to Rome.

¹⁵There, the brothers and sisters had been informed of our arrival, and came out to meet us as far as the Appian Forum and the Three Taverns. When Paul saw them, he gave thanks to God and took courage. ¹⁶Upon our arrival in Rome, the captain turned the prisoners over to the military governor, but permitted Paul to lodge in a private house with the soldier who guarded him.

ACTS 28:1-16

Read: Paul and his companions make a landfall in Malta. At first, the natives thought Paul as a murderer, afterward a god. Their hospitality during his stay on the island is exemplary.

Reflect: Are you hospitable to strangers? Have you felt genuinely welcomed by anyone? Do you think that hospitality should be an essential element for the coexistence of people of different cultures and religions?

Pray: Thank God for the people He placed in your life and have opened their home for you. At the same time, ask that you may be able to do the same for others.

Act: Be sensitive to people around you who might be in need. Act appropriately to provide hospitality and generosity to a stranger in need.

Paul meets the Jews in Rome

¹⁷After three days, Paul called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had gathered, he said to them: “Brothers, though I have not done anything against our people or against the traditions of our fathers, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. ¹⁸They examined me and wanted to set me free, for they saw nothing in my case that deserved death. ¹⁹But the Jews objected, so I was forced to appeal to Caesar without the least intention of bringing any case against my own people. ²⁰Therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel, that I bear these chains.”

²¹They answered: “We have not received any letter about you from Judea; and none of the brothers who have come from there have brought any message or said anything against you. ²²But we wish to hear from you what you think; although we know already, that everywhere, people speak against this sect that you belong to.”

²³They set a day for him and came in great numbers to his lodging. So Paul explained everything he wanted to tell them regarding the kingdom of God, and tried to convince them concerning Jesus, taking the law of Moses and the prophets as his starting point. This continued from morning till night. ²⁴Some were convinced by his words, others were

not. ²⁵Finally, the Jews left, still arguing strongly among themselves; and Paul sent them away with this statement: “What the Holy Spirit said has come true, when he spoke to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah:

²⁶*Go to these people and say to them: However much you hear, you will not understand; you will see, and see again, but not perceive.*

²⁷*The heart of these people have grown hard; they have covered their ears and closed their eyes; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears; lest their spirit understand, and I should heal them.*

²⁸Let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the pagans: they will listen.”

³⁰Paul stayed for two whole years in a house he, himself, rented, where he received, without any hindrance, all those who came to see him. ³¹He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught the truth about Jesus Christ, the Lord, quite openly and without any hindrance.

ACTS 28:17-31

Read: Paul bears witness to his faith among the Jews of Rome and insists that he is not against the laws, traditions, or Jewish customs. The Jews reject the gospel again, and again Paul states that he will preach to the Gentiles. The book does not relate what happens to Paul after his two-year stay in Rome.

Reflect: The encounter with Jesus changed Paul’s life completely: from persecutor to apostle. Why are you a Christian? Do you consider urgent to witness your faith in Christ today? Paul was able to adapt the Gospel to the language and context of his listeners. Do you think the Church adapts the Word of God into the language and context of today’s world?

Pray: Thank God for having met the Risen Christ and for the gift of faith. Ask for Paul’s strength to face the difficulties, punishment, and rejection because of the Gospel.

Act: Tell the story of your own faith to your own people. Do not be afraid to be rejected, trust in the divine company and providence.