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 the 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 were 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 the 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 onwards, 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 the Acts ends abruptly, as if Luke, like the runner whose job is to accompany 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 20:3: “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.
Jesus taken up to heaven

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

But first he had instructed through the Holy Spirit the apostles he had chosen. After 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. Once 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: John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit within a few days.”

When they had come together, they asked him, “Is it now that you will restore the Kingdom of Israel?” And he answered, “It is not for you to know the time and the steps that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But 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.”

9 After Jesus said this, he was taken up before their eyes and a cloud hid him from their sight. While they were still looking up to heaven where he went, suddenly, two men dressed in white stood beside them and 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.”

Later with the call of Abraham and the journey of Moses, we discover that in this universe there is one country which is particularly blessed by God, it is the Land of Promise; when David settles in Jerusalem, this city becomes the city of David, and at the same time, the city of God. From then on the Psalmist can say: “God preferred Jerusalem to all the towns of Jacob” (Ps 87:2) and in this Holy City, it is on the Temple Mount that God has prepared his dwelling (I K 8:29). Thus gradually, according as God walks side by side with his people, lighting up the way with his Word, all eyes become fixed on Jerusalem and on the Temple.

Now, it is when people have destroyed the true Temple (Jn 2:19), the humanity of the Son by nailing him to the cross, that God brings forth life from death, and from then on, a new dynamic will burst forth from Jerusalem towards the other countries of the Promised Land (Judea and Samaria), and from the Promised Land to the ends of the earth. Each of the gospels in their own way, finishes with the sending of the disciples. Similarly, from the first pages of the Acts, Jesus reminds his Church of the demands of mission: when the Church, or even when the smallest community ceases to be missionary, she is no longer the Church of Christ.

After Jesus said this, he was taken up before their eyes (v. 9). Jesus multiplied the “proofs” of his resurrection for those whose vocation would be to become witnesses of the risen Christ (v. 3), but now he must let the disciples know the significance of the resurrection. In this final apparition on the day of his ascension, Jesus revealed to them the meaning of his own story: having come from the Father, he returns to the Father but he does not return alone, he brings with him a “captive people” (Eph 4:8) whom he
The disciples await the Holy Spirit

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount called Olives, which is a fifteen-minute walk away. 13 On 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. 14 All of these together gave themselves to constant prayer. With them were some women and also Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

Matthias elected

15 It was during this time that Peter stood up in the midst of the community – about one hundred and twenty in all – and 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. 17 He 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. 19 This 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).

20 In 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. 21 Therefore we must choose someone from among those who were with us during all the time that the Lord Jesus moved about with us, 22 beginning 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.”

23 Then they proposed two: Joseph, called Barsabbas, also known as Justus, and Matthias. 24 They prayed: “You know, Lord, what is in the hearts

snatches from the power of darkness in order to bring them into his Kingdom of Light (Col 1:13), he goes to prepare a place for us, so that where he is, we may be too (Jn 14:2-3). For the moment, the disciples are still in this world, where they must bear witness to the new reality of the kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus: a Kingdom which is not like the earthly kingdoms founded on power and money (Lk 22:25-26), but a Kingdom of love, of justice, of peace. This Kingdom is not to be found in the clouds, it is already in our midst (Lk 17:20-21) and it grows each time we let ourselves be guided by the Spirit of God.

12. The apostles cannot begin such a difficult mission before they have received the Holy Spirit. They have done everything that depended on them and now can only put themselves in the hands of God and wait perseveringly in prayer for the time he has fixed.

As John has done in giving us the word of Jesus to his mother, present at the foot of the cross (Jn 19:26-27), Luke here reveals to us the spiritual maternity of Mary. She is there sharing in the longing of the apostles, she is the New Eve, the new mother of all the living (Gen 3:20).

Mary, mother of Jesus, played a decisive role during those days when the apostles tried to reflect together on all they had seen and learned from Jesus, in order to clarify the message they had to give to the world. Mary, only witness of the announcement and of the private life of Jesus, helped them perceive the mystery of his divine personality.

Luke does not speak about this: from now on Mary keeps herself in the background. Different from those “brothers of Jesus” who long for power in the Church, she is but a praying presence. From that moment the Church has a hierarchy but all those called to receive the Spirit are full members of this community or communion.

15. Peter is acting here as head of the primitive Church. The death of Judas has left a vacancy in the “college of apostles” whose twelve members bring to mind the twelve sons of Jacob. Just as the Israel of old never accepted being deprived of one or many of its tribes, so too, Peter, will not permit the group of the Twelve to have one of its members amputated.

Peter will find a way to allow God to make known his choice. We may be surprised today that such an important decision could have been made by casting lots. Is this not a sort of washing one’s hands of the decision-making process? We must not forget that this episode is happening in a community whose religious culture welcomes signs from God. They know the qualities they
of all. Show us, therefore, which of the two you have chosen 25 to replace Judas in this apostolic ministry which he deserted to go to the place he deserved.”

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

The coming of the Holy Spirit

1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly out of the sky came a sound like a strong rushing wind and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. There appeared 4 tongues as if of fire which parted and came to rest upon each one of them.

4 All were filled with Holy Spirit and began to speak other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

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

would want to see in the candidates and two are eligible. Now the question is which one to choose? They pray to God to make his decision known and promise to accept the outcome. This election process, in the spirit of prayer and of abandonment to God, is not finally as good as certain election processes, not excluding those used by the cardinals in conclave, where the real challenges to the Church have often been compromised by the dishonest voting of interested parties?

It is good to focus in this passage on the conditions which Peter laid down: To have followed Jesus from John’s baptism until the day when he was taken from us.” The Good News begins with the preaching of John and culminates with the ascension (Acts 13:14-31). In this way Mark’s is the typical gospel, Matthew and Luke have both added an introduction, the infancy narratives, while John makes use of a prologue to act as a kind of preface. For each of the evangelists, it is the resurrection accounts that dominate their gospels and give them meaning.

Like on so many occasions in the Old Testament (Jacob, Samuel, David…) God again chooses the second and possibly even the more simple person: let us examine the “calling card” of the first: Joseph named Barsabbas, also known as Justus while it is Matthias, without any other name or nickname, who is chosen by God.

• 2.1 Pentecost was one of the greatest feasts of the Jewish calendar. Originally an agricultural feast, in the latter centuries of the Old Testament it became the celebration of the giving of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. For this occasion, like for the Passover, many Jews from the countries around the Mediterranean came on pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

It was during the Jewish Passover, which commemorated the liberation from slavery in Egypt, that Jesus, by his own death and resurrection, offered the world freedom from death and sin; it is on the day when the gift of the Law on Sinai is celebrated, the day when God made his covenant with the chosen people, that God now gives his Spirit to the “Israel of God” (Gal 6:16).

That very day the baptism of fire announced by John (Lk 3:16) takes place. God sends the Spirit of his Son and, with this, the Church is born. For the Church is not a human institution, or the work of a group of believers; it comes from God’s initiative, and God wills that individuals of every nation witness this event.

What happened at Pentecost was as unique as what was accomplished by the resurrection. Nevertheless it follows the pattern of other interventions of God in history. On one hand, the Spirit constantly brings about our apostolic renewals, religious awakenings, and dynamic communities that become the new blood of the Church, which constantly grows old and constantly needs renewal.

The Spirit comes to give life to the Church. It also comes to confirm or affirm the believers. The baptism of fire that the apostles receive is normally conferred on us through confirmation (see commentary on 8:9).

The rushing wind is a sign, because spirit means both breath and wind in the Hebrew culture. Inspired by the Spirit, Peter speaks up. He now knows the truth and believes, and this is why he can boldly proclaim it (Jn 15:26 and 16:13).

Each one heard them speaking in his own language. The repetition of this expression on three occasions (verses 6, 8, 11) is for us a hint that here is a key for understanding this passage. The miracle of Pentecost is not really in the fact that the apostles, all of Palestinian origin, began to speak in foreign languages, but in the fact that all the foreigners heard the proclamation of God’s wonderful deeds in their own language: that is the miracle of Pentecost. Many
Jews and foreigners who accept Jewish beliefs, Cretians and Arabians; and all of us hear them proclaiming in our own language what God, the Savior, does.

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

Peter addresses the crowd

• 14 Then 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. 15 These people are not drunk as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. 16 Indeed what the prophet Joel spoke about has happened:

Jl 3:1

17 In 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.

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

19 I will perform miracles in the sky above and wonders on the earth below.

20 The sun will be darkened and the moon will turn red as blood, before the great and glorious Day of the Lord comes.

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

• 22 Fellow 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. 23 You delivered him to sinners to be crucified and killed, and in this way the purpose of God from all times was fulfilled. 24 But God raised him to life and released him from the bonds of death.

In those days I will pour out my Spirit, that is to say, in the Old Testament, the day of God’s judgement. According to Joel it appears that the people of Israel alone will escape punishment; but Peter expands the text and affirms (v. 39), at the end of his speech, that the salvation which comes from God is promised to all, to those who are near and to those who are afar, to all those represented here by the foreigners of diverse nationality.

God raised him to life. Peter recalls how Jesus showed many signs of love during his public life: in spite of that, or more precisely, because of that, he was delivered into the hands of pagans: how mysterious it is that people reject God’s love. More than 700 years before the coming of Jesus, the prophet Hosea was already familiar with this rejection of God’s love (Hos 11:1-4) and Jesus, himself, announces it in the parable of the murderous vineyard tenants (Mt 21:33-39). However, God, whose love is more powerful than our sins (Rom 5:20), raised him from the dead and made him the source of salvation for all (vv. 33 and 36).

Repent. Peter uses these words of Jesus at the beginning of his speech (Mt 4:17) – the Church is beginning to fall into the steps of Jesus – now it is no longer a question of receiving the baptism of John the Baptist, which was only a ritual of purification, highlighting the desire to repent. We must receive baptism “in the Name of Jesus.”

What shall we do?... Repent. In those days, to repent and to be converted meant to share the life of the infant Church which showed to the
nation the way of salvation taught by Jesus. The Church did not appear as a new religion opposed to Judaism, but as a center of more authentic life.

* Save yourselves from this crooked generation (v. 40). This means that the entire generation was missing the unique opportunity they were given. For God asked them to take the most decisive step in Sacred History; even Roman oppression could be overcome by a people able to put the Gospel into practice. At the same time Jesus made them discover the love of God the Father for which the whole Bible had prepared them.

Some three thousand were added to their number (v. 41). They already knew of Jesus, but were not committed to him. They were converted by the common action of the Holy Spirit and the apostles. A church in which signs of the Spirit acting could not be seen could not say that Jesus lives in her midst.

• 42. Those who have been baptized feel strongly united by the new faith and long for a communal life. As they gather in private houses and the communities are not too big, they can know each other and share everything.

The first community

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

A holy fear came upon all the people of Jerusalem. They were narrator of events by the Spirit acting through the apostles; each knew all the events as they happened.

The Spirit of Jesus comes to us through the Word and the Eucharist: these are the sources of the Church’s dynamism. By the word, we do not mean the study of the Bible merely to know the Bible. The Bible helps us realize how God continues to speak to us through the actual achievements of our life, the community and the world.

The expression breaking of the bread could
people, for many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.

Now all the believers lived together and shared all their belongings. They would sell their property and all they had and distribute the proceeds to others according to their need. Each 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; and won the people’s favor. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

**Peter and John cure a lame man**

Once when Peter and John were going up to the Temple at three in the afternoon, the hour for prayer, a 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.

When he saw Peter and John on their way into the Temple, he asked for alms. Then Peter with John at his side looked straight at him and said, “Look at us.” So he looked at them, expecting to receive something from them. But 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!”

Then he took the beggar by his right hand and helped him up. At once his feet and ankles became firm, and 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.

All the people saw him walking and praising God; they 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.

While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, struck with astonishment, came running to them in Solomon’s Porch, as it was called. When 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? The 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. You rejected the Holy and Just One, and you insisted that a murderer be released to you. You killed the Master of life, but God raised him from the dead and we are witnesses to this. It 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.

17 Yet I know that you acted out of ignorance, as did your leaders. 18 God has fulfilled in this way what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. 19 Repent, then, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out 20 and the time of refreshment may come by the mercy of God, when he sends the Messiah appointed for you, Jesus. 21 For he must remain in heaven until the time of the universal restoration which God spoke of long ago through his holy prophets.

22 Moses 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. 23 Whoever does not listen to that prophet is to be cut off from among his people.

24 In fact, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel onward, have announced the events of these days. 25 You 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. 26 It 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.”

Peter and John are arrested

While Peter and John were still speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them. 2 They 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. 3 Since it was already evening, they arrested them and put them in custody until the following day. 4 But despite this, many of those who heard the Message believed and their number increased to about five thousand.

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

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke up, “Leaders of the people! Elders! 9 It is a fact that we are being examined today for a good deed done to a cripple. How was he healed? 10 You and all the people of Israel must know that this man stands before you cured through the Name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene. You had him crucified, but God raised him from the dead. 11 Jesus is the stone rejected by you the builders which has become the cornerstone. 12 There is no salvation in together. Humanity is on its way to the coming of Christ and the restoration of the world, namely, the Resurrection.

He sends him to bless (v. 26). This blessing comes to those who accept reconciliation with God upon seeing the love he revealed to us in Jesus. The blessing is not for us alone, rather, through us – the people of God – it reaches all the families of the earth.

• 4.1 The Jewish leaders judge Peter and John. The Holy Spirit judges the leaders of the Jews.

These leaders believe they possess the truth because they are learned and have authority. It is impossible for them to back down before ordinary men who refute their statements. Meanwhile Peter points out how strange it is to be arrested for having healed a sick man (v. 8).

These leaders were Sadducees and they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead: Acts 23:6.

This text suggests that all of us can be the witnesses of Christ and of the truth, if we are determined to be involved. Oftentimes, because we only rely on our own strength instead of counting on the Spirit of Christ, we remain silent before our co-workers or our leaders.

What we have seen and heard (v. 20). It is John speaking: see 1 John 1:1.
Jean did not ask for this; yet they were doing it, inspired by the desire of every true believer to remove all divisions between brothers and sisters, especially those created by money. Placing everything in common, however, requires not only a spirit of detachment, but also a sense of responsibility and organization. The believers in Jerusalem lived at a time when work and foresight were not very important, and they soon consumed what they had, without being concerned about working, and eventually became the “poor of Jerusalem.” Paul was to organize collections in other churches in order to assist them (Gal 2:10; Rom 15:25; 2 Cor 8).

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

So they ordered them to leave the council room while they consulted with one another. They 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. But 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.”

They called them back and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s eyes for us to obey you rather than God. We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.” Then 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, for the man who had been miraculously healed was over forty years old.

The prayer of the community

As 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.

When 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, you 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? The kings of the earth were aligned and the princes gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah.

For 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. Thus, indeed, they brought about whatever your powerful will had decided from all time would happen.

But now, Lord, see their threats against us and enable your servants to speak your word with all boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and to work signs and wonders through the Name of Jesus your holy servant.”

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

An attempt to share everything

The 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. With 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.

There was no needy person among them, for those who owned land or houses, sold them and brought the proceeds of the sale. And they laid it at the feet of the apostles who distributed it according to each one’s need.

This is what a certain Joseph did. He was a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas, meaning: “The encouraging one.”

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

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? 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.”

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

About three hours later Ananias’s wife came but she was not aware of what had happened. Peter challenged her, “Tell me whether you sold that piece of land for this price?” She said, “Yes, that was the price.” 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.”

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.

And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of it.

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.

As children many of us were taught about the wonders God did in the past, as if God only acted in those days. The Jews of that time thought exactly the same way. The Bible spoke of the time of Moses when those who rebelled against God’s prophet were killed by divine intervention (Num 12:1; 16:1; 17:16). God continues to work in the Christian community, and the ordinary believers of Jerusalem suddenly discover that Peter, the fisherman, is not inferior to Moses. See also Acts 13:11; 1 Cor 11:30.

The couple’s sin does not consist in having kept part of their goods. Nobody was forcing them to sell their property and to give the money to the community. They wanted to deceive the apostles and give the impression they were donating everything, when in fact they were not.

We must be very careful when we speak of God’s punishment. For a Christian, the only punishment is to be forever separated from God. Death itself does not mean that God wants to punish us. Yet the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira served as a warning and a sign for the others.

Here the word church appears. Its exact meaning is “the assembly gathered by God,” and before Jesus’ time, the Jews used it to mean the new people that God was going to form in the messianic age. The believers continue to be proud of being Jewish, of being the people of God; nevertheless, little by little, the Holy Spirit separates them from the official community. They are already aware that they are the new people (Ps 22:32) gathered by God. The Church still means only the Christian community of Jerusalem. As other communities arise – other churches – “the Church” will refer to the entire people of God.

So an ever-increasing number of men and women, believed in the Lord (v. 14). All the Jews believed in God who spoke through the prophets. It was easy for them to believe in the prophets of the past after the religious authorities acknowledged them and placed their warnings in all the books of the Bible. But it was quite a different thing to recognize Jesus as the prophet that God had sent them but whom they had rejected. The text states that to believe in the Lord and join the community are two insepara-
ers 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.

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.

The apostles arrested again

17. The High Priest and all his supporters, that is the party of the Sad-ducees, became very jealous of the apostles; 18 so they arrested them and had them thrown into the public jail. 19 But 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.” 21 Accordingly 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. 22 But 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.”

24 Upon hearing these words, the captain of the Temple guard and the high priests were baffled, wondering where all of this would end. 25 Just then someone arrived with the report, “Look, those men whom you put in prison are standing in the Temple, teaching the people.” 26 Then 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.

27 So 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.” 29 To this Peter and the apostles replied, “Better for us to obey God rather than any human authority!

30 The God of our ancestors raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a wooden post. 31 God set him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to their own political system. For the disciples of Jesus, to be converted meant to acknowledge complicity with those who put Jesus to death and to take the path indicated by him. Since they were living among oppressors and resentful people, this was a very dangerous road (Lk 21:12-16).

In fact, when the priests judged Peter and John, they only demanded that they break away from this man (Jesus) whom they had legally condemned.

Proclaiming Jesus means preaching universal reconciliation ( Eph 2:14), which is achieved at all levels of human life, including the economic and political. The Church would not be following Christ, nor would it be proclaiming Jesus as the only Savior (5:31), if it refused to be concerned that entire nations are condemned to die slowly through lack of food, education, and health. This critical concern, however, would not be Christian preaching if it did not convince us to believe in the saving plan of God.
grant repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. 32 We are witnesses to all these things, as well as the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.”

33 When the Council heard this, they became very angry and wanted to kill them. 34 But 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 and then he spoke to the assembly.

“Fellow Israelites, consider well what you intend to do to these men. 36 For 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. 37 After 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. 38 So, 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. 39 If, on the other hand, it is from God, you will not be able to destroy it and you may indeed find yourselves fighting against God.” The Council let themselves be persuaded. 40 They called in the apostles and had them whipped, and ordered them not to speak again of Jesus Savior. Then they set them free.

41 The apostles went out from the Council rejoicing that they were considered worthy to suffer disgrace for the sake of the Name.

6 In 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. 2 So the Twelve summoned the whole body of disciples together and said, “It is not right that we should

1. Gamaliel was one of the most renowned among the masters of the Law. Here we see the open mind of this old Jewish teacher who knows that God’s ways are not always the ways of humans.

If their project or activity is of human origin (v. 38). Jesus had said something similar (Mt 15:13). Yet that does not seem evident. Are we not aware of many false doctrines that last? If they have lasted for centuries, perhaps it is due to the fact that in spite of the error and the evil they sow, they contain useful or necessary principles for a given time, or for certain human groups. Perhaps they make very important statements that the Church should proclaim but cannot or does not want to do. Experience shows that the majority of humans are not ready to embrace the Christian faith: must God abandon them because of that? Can we, who have Christ, say with certitude that such and such a one is not “the prophet.” Maybe God’s will is that he be the prophet of a certain group and help them in their searching for God (Acts 17:27).

Gamaliel was Paul’s teacher in Jerusalem for doubtless three or four years, a little after these events (Acts 22:3). Paul’s conversion will be providentially prepared through contact with this open and sincere man, and equally so through the death of Stephen (7:54-60).

6.1 We must not think that Jesus indicated in every detail how the apostles were to organize the Church. A conflict took place between two social groups. It seems that these Hellenists followed the Essene party, who did not accept the legitimacy of the High Priests and who refrained from participating in the Temple rituals. The clash of ideas between “Hebrews” and “Hellenists” causes mutual mistrust so that it became necessary to give some autonomy to the Hellenists. Since the apostles identified more readily with the Hebrews, the others would have their own ministers for certain functions.

The community chooses seven men and the apostles give them a share in their authority, because any mission has its roots in Christ through the apostles.

The candidates must be filled with faith and the Holy Spirit, because they are not only entrusted with material services. And even if it were only for material services the Church would have much to suffer from competent administrators who lacked the Spirit of the Gospel. Were these seven men the first deacons? Luke mentions nothing beyond service, and “deacon” denotes servant, usually steward. In fact, this term, “deacons,” will from the start give the meaning of every ministry in the Church: ministry means “service” (1 Cor 12:15). Ministers are
The prophet Hosea, eight centuries before Christ, already expressed the drama of the rejected love of God by his people (Hos 11:1-4). Stephen proclaims it again: this drama reached its culmination when Jesus the Nazarean was nailed to the cross (Acts 2:23; 3:15; 4:10).

Stephen dies as Christ did. He becomes the first martyr (martyr means witness). He is a witness to Christ because he proclaims him, but even more so because he does as Christ did, he forgives his murderers.

Like Peter after Pentecost, Stephen still hopes for a conversion of the Jewish people: a minority at least will be converted. This hope will fade in time with the persecutions raised against the Church. The murder of Stephen would be the first sign leading the converted Jews to understand that apostolic work must be undertaken beyond the frontiers of the Jewish fortress.

Later, when it becomes clear that the Jewish community has rejected the Gospel, Paul will strive to build among pagan nations a network of communities, a new people of God. Then Paul and the other apostles will search for all those who, in any nation, have been predestined by God. They see the Church as a people of "saints."

However, it again appears that many in the Church are not converted. As soon as the community grows and organizes itself, all the
The 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: ‘Leave your land and your relatives and go to the land which I will show you.’ So 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. And 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. So God spoke: ‘Your descendants shall live in a strange land, they shall be enslaved and maltreated for four hundred years. So 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.’ He 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.

The patriarchs envied Joseph so they sold him into Egypt. But God was with him. He 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. Then 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. Upon learning that there was wheat in Egypt, Jacob sent our ancestors there on their first visit. On the second visit, Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Pharaoh came to know the family of Joseph. Joseph commanded that his father Jacob be brought to him with the whole of his family of seventy-five persons. Jacob then went down to Egypt where he and our ancestors died. They 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.

As the time of promise drew near, which God had made to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt until came another king who did not know Joseph. Dealing cunningly with our race, he forced our ancestors to abandon their newborn infants and let them die. At that time Moses was born, and God looked kindly on him. For three months he was nursed in the home of his father; and when they abandoned him, Pharaoh’s daughter took him and raised him as her own son. So Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. He was mighty in word and deed. And when he was forty years old, he wanted to visit his own people, the Israelites. When he saw one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and killed the Egyptian. He thought his kinsfolk would understand that God was sending him to them as a liberator, but they did not understand. On 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?’ At that moment, the one who was injuring his companion rebuffed him saying: ‘Who appointed you as our leader and for the Christian organizations are more attractive than the words of the Gospel: sell all your belongings, preach on the rooftops, go to the poor, do not be called “father.”

The only way to escape from this return to “the Synagogue” is to do what the first Christians did after Stephen’s death: leave our beloved nest for the mission of proclaiming the whole Gospel.
written in the Book of the Prophets: ‘People of Israel, did you offer me burnt offerings and sacrifices for forty years in the desert? No, 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.’

44 Our ancestors had the Tent of Meeting in the desert, for God had directed Moses to build it according to the pattern he had seen. 45 Our 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 46 who found favor with God and asked him to let him build a house for the God of Jacob. 47 However, it was Solomon who built that temple.

48 In 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?’

51 But 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. 52 Was 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, 53 you who received the Law through the angels but did not fulfill it.”

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

57 But they shouted and covered their
ears with their hands and rushed together upon him. 58 They 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. 59 As they were stoning him, Stephen prayed saying: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”
60 Then 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.

**8.1** The death of Stephen leads to a resurrection. Instead of Stephen, the Church will have a new apostle in Saul who, after his conversion, will become “St Paul.” So God heard the prayer of Stephen for his murderers.

The illegal execution of Stephen unleashes the persecution against the Hellenist Christians. The apostles and others in the Hebrew group were not persecuted, because they were considered loyal to the Jewish religion and traditions.

Concerning Saul’s attitude, see what he himself will say later in Galatians 1:13.

**4.** The persecuted Christians proclaim their faith and start Christian communities in Samaria.

Evangelization brings happiness: God reveals himself, and through his Spirit he heals bodies and hearts. God becomes present. What a marvelous and moving thing! Joy, rather than fear and sectarianism, will always surround authentic Christians.

**9.** Who is the most important person in this passage? Simon? No: it is the Holy Spirit.

**Philip** is one of the seven. He baptizes but he cannot communicate the gifts of the Spirit.

Baptism and the laying on of hands are the two stages of Christian initiation; they refer to two different aspects of life in the church. Baptism is the renewal of the individual through faith. While, the laying on of hands expresses the transmission of the Spirit in an uninterrupted way, beginning with those who received it at Pentecost.

This laying of hands (which has become confirmation in today’s Church) was then usually followed by these manifestations we read of in the Acts (19:6) and in Paul (1 Cor 12 and 14). The spectacular aspect of these gifts is often what impresses us most; they were part of a global experience that is still given in one way or another to those who have surrendered to the Spirit.

Simon, a magician, quack or hypnotist, gave Peter the opportunity to condemn a false understanding of spiritual gifts. Simon thought the apostles were more powerful magicians than he was, and wanted to buy the power of working certain miracles. Peter gives us to understand that looking for miracles is clearly not the way to prepare for receiving the Spirit. In any case, such things are not bought.

The manifestations of the Spirit are not always like the ones mentioned in Acts (see Acts 19:6 and 1 Cor 12). This is because God adapts his gifts to the needs of the Church.

Communities of simple, poor people are those that receive more gifts of healing for the sick. Because they lack normal resources, God becomes present. Prayer groups receive the gift of tongues, which is one of the gifts that strengthen piety. The gift of prophecy manifests itself in various ways according to context. Where faith leans heavily on the certainty of divine justice and the fear of God, we see predictions and revelations of the secrets of the heart. Whereas, among those with a more rational and intellectual bent, the prophet is often characterized by the gift of speaking with assurance and the ability to stress a point in such a way that the community or individuals recognize the voice of God.
passed himself off as a very important person. 10 All the people, from the last to the greatest, put their trust in him, saying, “This is the Power of God, the Great One.” 11 And they followed him because he had held them under the spell of his magic for a long time. 12 But 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.

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

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

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

20 Peter replied, “May you and your money perish for thinking that the Gift of God could be bought with money!

21 You cannot share in this since you do not understand the things of God.

22 Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours and pray to the Lord that you may be forgiven such a wrong way of thinking; 23 I see you are poisoned with bitterness and in the grip of sin.”

24 Simon answered, “Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that none of these things you spoke of will happen to me.”

25 Peter 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

26 An angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south towards the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, the desert road.” 27 So 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 28 and was on his way home. He was sitting in his carriage and reading the prophet Isaiah.

29 The Spirit said to Philip, “Go and catch up with that carriage.” 30 So 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

The Spirit continues to be at work in many believers who, perhaps, neither speak in tongues nor work healings, but act under the inspiration of the Spirit. They produce the ‘fruits of the Spirit’ (Gal 5:22-24) and are thus authentic witnesses of Jesus.

Baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus (v. 16): See the note on 19:5 on that subject.

26. Note how the Holy Spirit leads Philip towards a man who was neither a Jew nor a Samaritan, the first person of another race to receive the Gospel.

The Ethiopian who is baptized is simply a man who ‘fears the Lord.’ This is the way they referred to people of other races who were attracted to the religion of the Jews and to faith in the one God. Without following all the Jewish customs, they read the Bible and liked to take part in the Jewish ceremonies.

The conversation with Philip begins on the basis of a text from Isaiah 53:7. This poem, called Servant of the Lord, speaks of a just man unjustly condemned who, through his sufferings, atones for the sins of all humankind. In this text the apostles saw one of the passages which best prefigured Christ; see commentary on Mark 14:24 and 1 Peter 2:24-25. Isaiah’s poem concludes with a veiled reference to the resurrection of the “Servant of the Lord.” It is marvelous to see how Philip can give a testimony of the Resurrection with such conviction that the Ethiopian believes in him.
and sit beside him. 32 This was the pas-
sage of Scripture he was reading:

   He was led like a sheep to be slaugh-
tered; like a lamb that is dumb before
the shearer, he did not open his mouth.

33 He was humbled and deprived of his
rights. Who can speak of his descen-
dants? For he was uprooted from the
earth.

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

35 Then Philip began to tell him the
Good News of Jesus, using this text of
Scripture as his starting point. 36 As
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)

38 Then he ordered the carriage to
stop; both Philip and the Ethiopian
went down into the water and Philip
baptized him. 39 When 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.

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

Saul meets Jesus

9 • 1 Meanwhile Saul considered no-
thing but violence and death for the
disciples of the Lord. 2 He 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.

3 As he traveled along and was ap-
proaching Damascus, a light from the
publican. “My God, have mercy on me, a sin-
er!” This is the characteristic conversion of a
militant Christian. However active we may be,
we will be unable to present ourselves as wit-
tesses to Christ, if we do not admit to being
forgiven sinners. This is why there is such Chris-
tian concern for universal reconciliation.

From then on, Saul (who will take the name
Paul) will be a chosen instrument of Christ to
spread the Church to other countries. Until then
the Church, which was led by and made up of
Jews, did not go beyond the Jewish people. Paul
was a Jew too, but had been educated outside his
country. He enjoyed the culture of the Greeks as
much as that of his own race. Because of that and
because of his exceptional personality, he was to
be the apostle to the Greeks.

The Church must constantly renew itself, and
is renewed through the conversion of adults.
Christian communities, even when they want to
be open to people who do not participate in
community affairs (for example, workers, or at
times, young people), are usually unable to be
really open. Thus the Lord calls some people
from different walks of life that, once they have
received the faith of the Church, will be able to
evangelize those of their own milieu and to
preserve their freedom with regard to traditional
groups.

In crucial times in history, Christ called
new men and women whom his Church
needed: Francis of Assisi and, closer to us,
John XXIII.

The Way: this is what Christianity was called;
the word expressed the fact that it is not only a
matter of religious teachings, but rather a new
way of life enlightened by hope.
sky suddenly flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?” And he asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The voice replied, “I am Jesus whom you persecute. Now get up and go into the city; there you will be told what you are to do.”

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

There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias, to whom the Lord called in a vision, “Ananias!” He answered, “Here I am, Lord!” Then 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, for 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.”

Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many sources about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem, and now he is here with authority from the High Priest to arrest all who call upon your name.” But 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. I myself will show him how much he will have to suffer for my name.”

So 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 Holy Spirit.” Immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he could see; he got up and was baptized. Then he took food and was strengthened.

• For several days Saul stayed with the disciples at Damascus, and he soon began to proclaim in the synagogues that Jesus was the Son of God. 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?”

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

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

When 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. 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.

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

**Peter visits the churches**

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

36 There was a disciple in Joppa named Tabitha, which means Dorcas or Gazelle. She was always doing good works and helping the poor. 37 At that time she fell sick and died. After having washed her body, they laid her in the upstairs room. 38 As 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.”

So 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. 40 Peter 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. 41 Peter gave her his hand and helped her up. Then he called in the saints and widows and presented her to them alive. 42 This became known throughout all of Joppa and many people believed in the Lord because of it. 43 As for Peter, he remained for some time in Joppa at the house of Simon, a tanner of leather.

**The baptism of Cornelius**

1 There was in Caesarea a man named Cornelius, captain of what was called the Italian Battalion. 2 He was a religious and God-fearing man together with his whole household. He gave generously to the people and constantly prayed to God. 3 One afternoon at about three he had a vision in which he clearly saw an

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• 32 Peter appears in his role of “inspector” of the churches (the word bishop means inspector).

It is said here that he visits the saints. In the years prior to Christ, the word “saints,” namely, those consecrated to God, was used especially to designate the new people of God since the coming of the Messiah (see Dn 7:27). Christians are the new people of God since they are the Church (see 5:11); they are also the saints.

The raising of Tabitha is similar to what Jesus did. It is an echo of the Resurrection of Christ, as the raising of Lazarus (Jn 11) or the widow’s son had been (Lk 7:11).

God wished to grant these signs to strengthen faith in Jesus’ resurrection. Besides the people who had been witnesses of his Resurrection, it was necessary that, in various places, the communities could see for themselves that God “raises the dead” (see Heb 11:19). Similar resurrections have been seen in the Church even in this century.

• 10.1 This is a new intervention of the Holy Spirit so that the Church would go beyond the Jewish world and the Gospel would reach other people. Cornelius (like the Ethiopian of 8:27) is a God-fearing man, that is to say, a foreigner who believes in the one God of the Jews, without being a member of the Jewish community.

The heavens were opened to him (v. 11). He may have seen a tent coming down – an image of God’s dwelling place in the world – which contained creatures considered unclean.

The Jewish religion included a whole series of prohibitions for believers. It distinguished between clean animals, namely those that could be eaten, and unclean ones that could not. The same regulations applied to people; Jews could not mix with non-Jews. Thus Peter’s vision, in which he is invited to eat unclean animals, means that he must not hesitate to go and stay in the house of Cornelius the Roman.

We do not know if Peter would have hesitated to baptize a non-Jew (and uncircumcised) as Cornelius was. The manifestation of the Holy Spirit forced his hand.

At last someone of another race is baptized! In many places today as well, the Church is in danger of being reduced to a closed social group, and, perhaps, of becoming antiquated. Popes and bishops invite us to go forward and to
angel of God coming towards him and calling him, “Cornelius!” 4 He 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. 5 Now send some men to Joppa and summon a certain Simon also known as Peter; 6 he is the guest of Simon, a tanner, who lives beside the sea.”

7 As 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, 8 and after having explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

9 The next day, while they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up to the roof at about noon to pray. 10 He became hungry and wished to eat, but while they were preparing food, he fell into a trance. 11 The 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. 12 In it were all kinds of four-legged animals of the earth, reptiles and birds.

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

17 While 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. 18 They called out to inquire whether Simon, also known as Peter, was staying there. 19 At that moment, as Peter continued pondering on the vision, the Spirit spoke to him, “There are men looking for you; 20 get up and go downstairs and follow them without hesitation, for I have sent them.”

21 So 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.”

23 So 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. 24 The following day, he arrived in Caesarea where Cornelius was expecting them; he had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 As Peter was about to enter, Cornelius went to him, fell on his knees and bowed low. 26 But Peter lifted him up saying, “Stand up, for I too am a human being.”

27 After talking with him, Peter entered and found many people assembled there. 28 Then 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.”

Cornelius 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 me and said to me: ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer, and your alms have been remembered before him. 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.’

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.”

Peter then spoke to them, “Truly, I realize that God does not show partiality,
but in all nations he listens to everyone who fears God and does good. 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. 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.

You know how God anointed Jesus the Nazarean with Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all who were under the devil’s power, because God was with him; we 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.

But God raised him to life on the third day and let him manifest himself, not 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. And 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. All the prophets say of him, that everyone who believes in him has forgiveness of sins through his Name.”

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

Then Peter declared, “Can we refuse to baptize with water these people who have received the Holy Spirit, just as we have?”

So Peter began to give them the facts as they had happened, “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.

As I stared

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**Peter justifies his conduct**

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

So Peter began to give them the facts as they had happened, “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. As I stared

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**11.** That Peter went to baptize a non-Jew seems to us the most normal thing. Let us not forget that the Christians of Jerusalem remained Jews, with their education, their prejudices and their sensibility. They did not see how a person could be part of Jesus’ family without first belonging to the people of God who, for them, identified itself with the Jewish nation. Could someone become their brother without first being circumcised? The warning they gave Peter is the first witness of the constant pressure that Christians have always brought to bear on their priests and bishops throughout history. Everyday that someone would like to open our Church to people of another culture, a powerful group will only be willing to accept those who consent to lose their own identity and be Christians in the way we ourselves are. These believ-
at it, I saw four-legged creatures of the earth, wild beasts and reptiles, and birds of the sky. Then I heard a voice saying to me: ‘Get up, Peter, kill and eat!’ I replied, ‘Certainly not, Lord! No common or unclean creature has ever entered my mouth.’ A second time the voice from the heavens spoke, “What God has made clean, you must not call unclean.” This happened three times, and then it was all drawn up into the sky. At that moment three men, who had been sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were staying. The 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. He 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. He will bring you a message by which you and all your household will be saved.” I had begun to address them when suddenly the Holy Spirit came upon them, just as it had come upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ If, 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?”

When 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.”

The foundation of the Church at Antioch

 Those who had been scattered because of the persecution over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message, but only to the Jews. But 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. The hand of the Lord was with them so that a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

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

Then Barnabas went off to Tarsus to look for Saul and 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.

At that time some prophets went down from Jerusalem to Antioch and 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 the Emperor Claudius. \(^{29}\) So the disciples decided, within their means, to set something aside and to send relief to the brothers and sisters who were living in Judea. \(^{30}\) They did this and sent their donations to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

**James is put to death; Peter’s miraculous escape**

\(^{12}\) About that time King Herod decided to persecute some members of the Church. \(^{2}\) He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword, and when he saw how it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.

This happened during the festival of the Unleavened Bread. \(^{4}\) Herod 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, but while Peter was kept in prison, the whole Church prayed earnestly for him.

On 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.

Suddenly 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, and the angel added, “Now, put on your cloak and follow me.”

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

Then 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.”

\(^{12}\) Peter 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.

When he knocked at the outside door, a maid named Rhoda came to answer it. \(^{14}\) On 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. \(^{15}\) They said to her, “You are crazy!” And as she insisted, they said, “It must be his angel.”

Meanwhile, Peter continued knocking and, when they finally opened the door, they were amazed to see him. \(^{17}\) He 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.
At daybreak there was a great commotion among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. Herod 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

At 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.

On the appointed day Herod, clothed in royal robes, sat on his throne and addressed them.

So the assembled crowd shouted back, “A god is speaking, not a man!”

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

Meanwhile the word of God was increasing and spreading.

Paul's first mission

These then, sent by the Holy Spirit, went down to the port of Seleucia and from there sailed to Cyprus.

Upon their arrival in Salamis they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogue; John was with them as an assistant.

They traveled over the whole island as far as Paphos where they met a certain magician named Bar-Jesus, a

**ACTS 12**

• 13.1 This is the beginning of Paul’s missions; for the time being he is sent as Barnabas’ assistant.

It is very difficult to know how the Church organized itself in the beginning. It did not have the same kind of hierarchy with three orders that we have now: bishops, presbyters (or priests) and deacons: this started only at the end of the first century. The Churches of Jerusalem and Antioch were certainly not directed as those in small towns. Most of the time, the communities chose their elders among the most trusted men. They had to be recognized or installed either by the apostles or some other superior authority and accepted by the neighboring communities. Their ministry as leaders included baptism, the celebration of the Eucharist and the anointing of the sick. This institution of the Elders (see 14:23 and 11:30) copied exactly the organization of the Jewish communities.

However, wherever there were prophets accepted as such (this was the case in Antioch), they enjoyed greater authority, somewhat like the apostles (1 Cor 12:28 and Eph 2:20).

Paul and Barnabas are not considered apostles yet, but they are prophets. As for the teachers: they are those who have the ability to teach doctrine and morality based on Scripture, for the service of the community.

Luke gives the details of the beginning of this mission. It emerges from the initiative of the Holy Spirit, but responds to the life of fervor of the community of Antioch. Note also that the community agrees to have two of its five leaders leave, and that Saul and Barnabas are ready to face the risks of this adventure.

The laying on of hands invokes the grace of God upon these two missionaries.

• 4. This first mission begins in a very traditional way. Jews could travel throughout the Roman empire: in any important city they would find other Jews involved in trade and always gathered in communities, in “synagogues.” From Antioch, Barnabas and Saul travel by sea to the island of Cyprus, Barnabas’ homeland.

The meeting with Sergius Paulus has the value of a sign: the Gospel not only convinces simple people, but also authorities. Paul is aware that he must witness before “kings and rulers” (Lk 21:12). The prophetic gifts of Saul are seen when he meets Sergius Paulus. From then on, the Book of Acts will no longer speak of Saul but
Jewish false prophet 7 who lived with the governor Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. He had summoned Barnabas and Saul and wanted to hear the word of God. 8 But they were opposed by the Elymas (that is, the magician) who tried to turn the governor from the faith.

9 Then Saul, also known as Paul, full of Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and 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? 11 Now 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.

12 The governor saw what had happened; he believed, and was deeply impressed by the teaching about the Lord.
Paul in the capital of Pisidia

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

16 So Paul arose, motioned to them for silence and began, “Fellow Israelites and also all you who fear God, listen. 17 The 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. 18 For forty years he fed them in the desert, 19 and after he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. 20 All this took four hundred and fifty years. 21 After 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. 22 After 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.

23 It is from the descendants of David that God has now raised up the promised savior of Israel, Jesus. 24 Before he appeared, John proclaimed a baptism of repentance for all the people of Israel. 25 As 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.’

26 Brothers, children and descendants of Abraham, and you also who fear God, it is to you that this message of salvation has been sent. 27 It 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. 28 Even though they found no charge against him that deserved death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. 29 And 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.

30 But God raised him from the dead, 31 and 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. 32 We ourselves announce to you this Good News: All that God promised our ancestors, he 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. 34 On 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.

35 Moreover, in another place it is said: You will not allow your holy one to suffer corruption. 36 Now David was subjected to corruption, for he died and was laid beside his ancestors after having served God’s purpose in his own time. 37 But the one God raised up – Jesus – did not know corruption. 38-39 Through 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.

40 Now watch out lest what was said by the prophet happen to you: 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.”

42 As Paul and Barnabas withdrew,
they were invited to speak again on the same subject the following Sabbath.

43 After 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.

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

46 Then 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. 47 For 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.”

48 Those who were not Jews rejoiced when they heard this and praised the message of the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace with the miraculous signs and wonders he gave them power to do.

49 Those 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.

50 Some 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. 51 The apostles shook the dust from their feet in protest against this people and went to Iconium, leaving the disciples filled with joy and Holy Spirit.

Iconium is evangelized

14 1 In 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. 2 But the Jews who would not believe stirred up the pagan people and poisoned their minds against the brothers. 3 In spite of this Paul and Barnabas spent a 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 power to do.

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

Lystra and Derbe

· Paul and Barnabas spent a fairly long time at Lystra. 8 There was a times that it should be easier to teach the faith in a place where everyone had a religion, and therefore a certain faith in God. This is not so. Having religion meant submitting to the totalitarian authority of customs and social traditions linked to this religion. People were enclosed in a system of interested relationships with their divinities where it was impossible even to imagine the reaction of a free person in relation to God. The non-believers in our modern societies have in fact been freed of many prejudices and confusions.

Paul saw that he had the faith to be saved. This man must have been still far from faith that recognized Jesus, Christ and Son of God, but it was the same faith of many of those Jesus healed in the Gospel. God does not call only theolo-
crippled man in Lystra who had never been able to stand or walk. 9 One day, as he was listening to the preaching, Paul looked intently at him and saw that he had the faith to be saved. 10 So he spoke to him in a loud voice, “In the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I command you to stand up on your feet!” And the man stood up and began to walk around.

11 When the people saw what Paul had done, they cried out in the language of Lycaonia, “The gods have come to us in human likeness!” 12 They named Barnabas Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes, since he was the chief speaker. 13 Even 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.

14 When 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. 16 In past generations he allowed each nation to go its own way, though 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.”

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

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

Return to Antioch

• 21 After proclaiming the gospel in that town and making many disciples, they returned to Lystra and Iconium and on to Antioch. 22 They were away from these useless things to the living God who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and all that is in them. 17:27

Paul and Barnabas go back the same way they had come. They visit all the communities established on the continent. Then they will sail for Antioch without returning to the island of Cyprus.

In those days the Church did not have parishes, clergy, institutions, or books. The apostle had to organize the Church in such a way that it might continue. There was a book, the Jewish Bible, namely, the Old Testament. The prophets inspired by God would draw new teachings from this book, by discovering a sign of Christ in the past. From time to time apostles or prophets coming from other churches would visit the community.

There will be gatherings around the celebration of the Lord’s Supper (see 1 Cor 11); besides the Eucharist, everyone will share with others their own spiritual gifts (see 1 Cor chapters 12–14). Just as the Jewish communities had leaders called “elders” or presbyters, Christians also lay their hands on leaders, “presbyters,” who will lead and preside over the Eucharist (see commentary on 13:1).

So we understand that a mission does not reach its goal if it does not succeed in forming adult communities, with their own leaders and with the active participation of their members.
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.” 23 In each church they appointed elders and, after praying and fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had placed their faith.

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

27 On 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. 28 They spent a fairly long time there with the disciples.

The council at Jerusalem

1 Some 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.”

2 Because 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.

3 They 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.

4 On 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. 5 Some 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. 6 So the apostles and elders met together to consider this matter.

7 As 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. 8 God, who can read hearts, put himself on their side by giving the Holy Spirit to them just as he did to us. 9 He made no distinction between us and them and cleared

Israel. Paul’s missions created a new element: communities formed in Greek countries with a majority of non-Jews and Paul laid down no condition for their baptism. For them the people of God was the Christian community. Would the Church be divided? Would Paul become the initiator of another “Christian” Church, more radical in its appreciation of salvation by faith alone in Christ? The meeting at Jerusalem was an effort of the whole Church to clarify its faith and safeguard its unity.

The manner of resolving the conflict clarified the communal aspect of the Church. The “elders” in charge of the mother-Church in Jerusalem met with the apostles who were the supreme authority in the Church. Simon Peter addresses them, referring to the experience he had in the case of Cornelius (chapter 11), and he opened the way to total freedom with regard to the Jewish religion.
ansed their hearts through faith. 10 So 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? 11 We believe, indeed, that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they are."

12 The 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.

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

16 After this I will return and rebuild the booth of David which has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins and set it up again. 17 Then 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 what he decided from the beginning.

19 Because of this, I think that we should not make difficulties for those non-Jews who are turning to God. 20 Let 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. 21 For from the earliest times Moses has been taught in every place, and every Sabbath his laws are recalled."

The council’s letters

22 Then 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. 23 They 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. 24 We 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. 25 But now, it has seemed right to us in an assembly, to choose representatives and to send them to you, along with our beloved non-Jews; it was also a way of saying that the Church was unable to live according to the "newness" of the Gospel, free of the past, free of religious discipline. In fact, a few years later, there was no question of these laws since the Church had freed itself of the Jewish community, just as it had been rejected by the Jews.

The following expressions are to be noted: the apostles, the elders, and the whole community… it has seemed right to the Holy Spirit and to us: the decision of the community united to its apostles guarantees the presence of the Holy Spirit. On several occasions in history, similar debates have taken place, but then it was not a question of freeing the Gospel of the Old Testament laws; it was the laws and customs of the Church that had become the impossible burden to carry (v. 10) for a large human majority. Only when a debate is wide open, as was the one at Jerusalem, does it succeed in pointing out the obstacles and ecclesiastical taboos. As long as the central organisms stifle the liberty of expression, the mission weakens and encloses itself within a traditional clientele decreasing day by day.
Barnabas and Paul, who have dedicated their lives to the service of our Lord Jesus Christ. We send you then Judas and Silas who themselves will give you these instructions by word of mouth.

We, with the Holy Spirit, have decided not to put any other burden on you except what is necessary: You 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.”

After saying good-bye, the messengers went to Antioch, where they assembled the community and handed them the letter. When they read the news, all were delighted with the encouragement it gave them.

Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, spoke at length to encourage and strengthen them. After they had spent some time there, the messengers were sent off in peace by the believers; Silas, however, preferred to stay with them and only Judas went off. So Paul and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching with many others the word of God.

Paul’s second mission

After 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.” Barnabas wanted to take with them John also called Mark, but 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. Such a sharp disagreement resulted that the two finally separated. Barnabas took Mark along with him and sailed for Cyprus. Paul, for his part, chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers and sisters to the grace of the Lord.

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

Paul recruits Timothy

Paul 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. As the believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him, Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him. So he took him and, because of the Jews of that place who all knew that his father was a Greek, he circumcised him.

As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, for

Luke gives but a few details of a journey that probably lasted two years. Paul’s letters give us an idea of the unremitting work he undertook to form believers and their leaders: a mission is more than gathering people together and
the people to obey. Meanwhile, the churches grew stronger in faith and increased in number every day.

When they came to Mysia, they tried to go on to Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to do this.

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. One of them was a God-fearing woman named Lydia from Thyatira City, a dealer in purple cloth.

As she listened, the Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying. After 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.

Paul and Silas in prison

One 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.

She 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.” The 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.

19 When 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. 20 And when they had turned them over to the officials, they said, “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.”

22 So they set the crowd against them and the officials tore the clothes off Paul and Silas and ordered them to be flogged. 23 And after inflicting many blows on them, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to guard them safely.

25 About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. 26 Suddenly 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. 27 The jailer woke up to see the prison gates wide open. Thinking that the prisoners had escaped, he drew his sword to kill himself, but Paul shouted to him, “Do not harm yourself! We are all still here.”

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

33 Even 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. 34 He led them to his house, spread a meal before them and joyfully celebrated with his whole household his newfound faith in God.

35 The next morning the officials sent police officers with the order, “Let those men go.” 36 So 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.”

37 But 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.”

38 The police officers reported this to the officials, who were afraid when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. 39 So they came and apologized to them, took them out and asked them to leave the town.

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

Difficulties in Thessalonica

1 Paul and Silas took the road through Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. 2 As Paul used to do, he went to the synagogue and on three Sabbaths he held discussions with them about the Scrip-
He 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."

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

This 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. Not 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, and Jason has given them hospitality. They all disregard the decrees of the Emperor and claim that there is another king, Jesus.”

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

As soon as night fell, the believers sent Paul and Silas off to Beroea. On their arrival they went to the Jewish synagogue. Its 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. Many of them came to believe, as did numerous influential Greek women, and many men as well.

But 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. At once, the believers sent Paul away to the coast; but both Silas and Timothy stayed in Beroea. Paul 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.

**Paul in Athens**

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he felt very uneasy at the sight of a city full of idols. He 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.

Epicureans 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.’ So they took Paul and led him off to the Areopagus.

Christian community will begin with people of Greek origin, worshippers of God, whom Paul met in the synagogue, and with other Greek pagans. The few Jewish converts (v. 4) will probably become the pillars and the educators of the community. They had a lasting experience of God’s word and knew how to use the Bible. They sang the psalms, had some idea of a liturgy in the framework of a community, and had a better grasp of moral principles. Paul will always be careful not to let the Jews bring the converts back to a religion of commandments, but it was doubtless that among them he would, for a time, find the better prepared elements. Persecution prevents Paul from staying more than two months. How could a church formed under such conditions and consisting of pagans with little training survive? Yet it persevered: see the Letters to the Thessalonians.

16. Athens was the most famous city in the Greek world. Even after the loss of political control, Athens remained the cultural center of the Roman world. Paul goes there, as he always aims for large cities or ports, where news travels from one place to another and spreads through sea travel.

He is offered the chance of speaking before the philosophers and the authorities of Athens, and he accepts. For these intellectuals he formally states his message, but it is a flop. It might have been expected. Usually those who accept the faith are those whose life draws nearer to Christ. His audience was only interested in novelties; they were masters, and Paul had no title. Paul confronted the Christian faith with the other religions, showing that for all peoples it was time to begin a new worldwide age. A first part recalled the fact of religious plurality: it was
hull, and said, “We would like to know what this new teaching is that you are talking about. 20 Some of the things we hear you say sound strange to us, and we would like to know what they mean.”

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

22 Then Paul stood up in the Areopagus hall and said, “Athenian citizens, I note that in every way you are very religious. 23 As 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.

24 God, 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. 25 Nor 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.

26 From 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. 27 He wanted them to seek him by themselves, even if it were only by groping for him, succeed in finding him.

Yet he is not far from any one of us. 28 For in him we live and move and have our being, as some of your poets have said: for we too are his offspring. 29 If 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.

30 But now God prefers to overlook this time of ignorance and he calls on all people to change their ways. 31 He 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.”

32 When 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.” 33 At that point Paul left. 34 But a few did join him, and believed. Among them were Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus court, a woman named Damaris, and some others.

Paul in Corinth

18:1 After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. 2 There 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. 3 Paul went to visit them and then stayed and worked with them because they shared the same trade of tentmaking. 4 Every Sabbath he held discussions in the synagogue, trying to convince both Jews and Greeks.

5 When 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. 6 One 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.”

7 So Paul left there and went to the house of a God-fearing man named Titus Justus who lived next door to the synagogue. 8 A 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.

9 One night, in a vision, the Lord said to Paul, “Do not be afraid, but continue speaking and do not be silent, 10 for many people in this city are mine. I am with you, so no one will harm you.”

11 So Paul stayed a year and a half in that place, teaching the word of God among them.

12 When 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.”

- 18:1 Corinth, the main port of Greece and capital of the province of Achaia with 600,000 inhabitants, of whom 400,000 are slaves, is a religious, commercial and cultural center. It has countless temples with thousands of prostitutes serving in them. The city is famous for its luxury and its corruption. Paul goes there and remains eighteen months – until the end of the year 52. This date is exact: history tells us that Gallio was governor of Achaia during the year 52.

Aquila and his wife, Priscilla, had just arrived in Corinth. They were perhaps already Christians, but Jewish Christians were not different from others before the decree of the emperor.

Aquila and Priscilla simply place themselves at Paul’s service to help him. They will assist him on other occasions with the natural availability of people who do not feel tied to any city or country.

A vision: there are not many in this book. Perhaps Paul was wondering whether it would not be better for him to retire for a time as he had already done and as Jesus had advised in case of persecution (Mt 10:23). The devil increases the opposition when someone sets foot on his field: in this center of corruption, grace would triumph.

The Jews brought him before the court. Here we have a new example of the problems Paul met in the great Roman centers. Different peoples co-exist and many conflicts are settled within communities according to their proper laws and customs. Gallio, the Roman governor, has no wish to be dragged into the jungle of traditions and disputes, especially with the Jews who enjoyed religious privileges within the Roman Empire.

The Jews are furious in seeing the success of Paul that relies on the Word of God, that is, on their own sacred books. They fear that the boldness of the Christians might stir a reaction from the pagans, in which case they, too, would be the victims.

They seized Sosthenes – and beat him. A sure bet would be that this Sosthenes, a Jew, is the one mentioned in 1 Cor 1:1. Even if he already acted as a prominent member of the Christian group, it is doubtful whether the Jews would have attacked him before the authorities: most probably it was a group of bystanders falling on a well-known Jew.

Paul had made a vow (v. 18). He shaved his head as it was said in Numbers 6:5. All that Paul had written to turn converted pagans away from the Jewish Law did not prevent him, a Jew, from feeling at ease with the traditional forms of Jewish piety. He knew that faith alone saves, but it was his wish to mark with a vow some secret agreement he had made with the Lord.
Paul 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. But 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.” And he sent them out of the court.

Then 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.

Paul 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.

When they reached Ephesus, he left Priscilla and Aquila behind and entered the synagogue to hold discussions with the Jews. But although they asked him to stay longer, he declined. And he took leave of them saying, “God willing, I will come back to you again.” Then he set sail from Ephesus.

On landing at Caesarea, he went up to greet the Church, and then went down to Antioch.

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

A certain Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, arrived at Ephesus. He was an eloquent speaker and an authority on the Scriptures, and 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. As 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. As 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, for he vigorously refuted the Jews, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah.

Paul in Ephesus

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior of the country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples whom he asked, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit?” Paul was one of the most valued missionaries (1 Cor 3:6; 4:6; 15:12). Apollos, we are told, knew something of The Way (v. 26). We have already met this term which denoted Christianity: not only a religion, nor only a faith or morale, but all that together and more. Apollos, like the twelve men mentioned in 19:1-7, had probably been in Palestine when Jesus was already known there. His teaching had not yet given rise to a movement nor made a stir equal to that resulting from John the Baptist’s preaching, which was followed by baptisms and commitments.

For three years, Paul wanted to evangelize Ephesus. Ephesus was one of the most beautiful and largest cities in the empire. Lute wanted to relate the baptism of these twelve disciples of John the Baptist. As we have just said they knew something of Jesus’ teaching, but as for being his disciples, they lacked what was most important: they had not received the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit came down upon them (v. 6).
Spirit when you became believers?” They answered, “We have not even heard that anyone may receive the Holy Spirit.” 3 Paul then asked, “What kind of baptism have you received?” And they answered, “The baptism of John.”

4 Paul 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.”

5 Upon hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 Then Paul laid his hands on them and the Holy Spirit came down upon them; and they began to speak in tongues and to prophesy. 7 There were about twelve of them in all.

8 Paul went into the synagogue and for three months he preached and discussed there boldly, trying to convince them about the Kingdom of God. 9 Some 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. 10 He 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.

- 11 God did extraordinary deeds of power through the hands of Paul. 12 Even 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.

13 Some 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.” 14 Among them were the seven sons of a Jewish priest named Sceva. 15 But 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?” 16 Then 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

See Acts 8:14-17. We must not forget that in the beginning, the Christian language was limited. We know that the Holy Spirit is much more than the manifestations that follow the laying on of hands. So we have such statements as: we have not heard that there is the Holy Spirit, while other texts state: that the Holy Spirit be received. The laying on of hands is meant to confirm the change worked at baptism through the experience of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:7). Many Christians would be surprised today if they have never had this tangible experience of God. Let us not say that these gifts are no longer useful or that such things do not happen today. What is important, surely, is to believe and live one’s faith rather than to feel it. Such an experience, however, is often the shock that gives rise to a re-blossoming of our faith: it shows us that God is near, and he is master of our inner self. Perhaps our rationalist temperament and our Church life, mistrustful of all that is a personal expression, serves as a dampener of the gifts of the Spirit; perhaps it is rather the poverty of our commitment to Jesus.

They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Are we to presume that in the beginning baptism was in the name of Jesus and not in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? It is not certain.

In the name of signifies: by the power of; maybe the baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit was called the baptism in the name of Jesus to distinguish it from the baptism of John and the baptisms of other religions. It is also possible that at the moment of receiving the water in the name of the Holy Trinity, the person baptized had to make a personal invocation in the Name of Jesus. Possibly also in early times, baptism was given “in the Name of Jesus” and later the Church modified the formula in order to distinguish itself from groups that believed in Jesus but without recognizing him as Son of God, born of the Father. There would be nothing to astonish us in such a change; the Church of the apostles had given the first formula; the same Church gave the second formula attributed to Jesus in Mt 28:19.

- 11. Many are the signs that Jesus promised for those who would believe (Mk 16:15-18). Similar things happen today when the Church becomes missionary again.

We are impressed by the cures. Perhaps the in-depth conversion of those who confess their magic practices and burn their precious books is more important. Apparently they did not do it at the time of their baptism but later, when they were more convinced of their faith.
mauled. 17 This 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.

18 Many of those who had become believers came forward and openly acknowledged their former practices. 19 Many 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.

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

The silversmiths’ riot

21 When 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.” 22 So he sent two of his assistants, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia ahead of him, while he himself stayed on for a time in Asia.

23 About that time the city was deeply troubled because of the way. 24 It 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. 25 He called them, together with others who did similar work, and said, “Friends, you know that our prosperity depends on this work. 26 But, 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. 27 The 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.”

28 On hearing this they became enraged and began shouting, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” 29 The 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. 30 Paul wished to face this crowd, but the disciples would not let him. 31 Some 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.

32 Meanwhile 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. 33 Some 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, 34 but when they recognized that he was a Jew, they chanted all together for about two hours, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

35 Finally 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? 36 Since these things are undeniable, you must calm yourselves and do nothing rash. 37 These
men whom you brought here are not temple-robbers nor have they spoken ill of our goddess. 38 If 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. 39 If there is anything further that needs to be investigated, let it be done in the lawful assembly. 40 For 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." 41 And the town clerk dismissed the assembly.

Paul returns to Macedonia

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

3 When 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. 4 When 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. 5 So they went ahead and waited for us in Troas, 6 while 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

7 On 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, 8 with many lamps burning in the upstairs room where we were gathered. A young man named Eutychius was sitting on the window ledge, 9 and 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.

10 Paul went down, bent over him and took him in his arms. “Do not be alarmed,” he said, “there is life in him.” 11 Then 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. 12 As for the young man, they lifted him up alive and were greatly comforted.

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

• Paul remains in Ephesus, and some details in his letters let us see that Luke’s account is very incomplete. The greater part of Paul’s activity is not mentioned, in particular the evangelization of the neighboring towns of Ephesus by a team of his assistants: see the Introduction to Ephesians. Paul had much to suffer, and was perhaps imprisoned (Introduction to the Philippians). It was at this time that he wrote his letter to the Galatians and the First Letter to the Corinthians.

Paul goes to Macedonia (where Thessalonica is located) and to Greece (where he spends some time in Corinth). There in Corinth, as he perseveres with his plan to go to Rome, he writes to the Romans.

• Luke tells us that the Eucharist took place on the day after the Sabbath – already our Sunday: the Christians had separated from the Jews, replacing the Sabbath with the following day, the first day of the week, the day of Jesus’ resurrection. Doing so they were putting on their calendar the major event of their faith.

Naturally they meet in a home and this is the beginning of the Christian gathering. They share instruction and reflection, concluding with thanksgiving (or Eucharist) and communion with the body of the Lord.

Each one could speak, and Paul as prophet and apostle had a good deal to say, prepared or inspired. What might have been Paul’s long discourse? He read and interpreted texts from
16 Paul 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**

17 From Miletus Paul sent word to Ephesus, summoning the elders of the Church. When 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, how I served the Lord in humility through the sorrows and trials that the Jews caused me. You know that I never held back from doing anything that could be useful for you; I spoke publicly and in your homes and I urged Jews and non-Jews alike to turn to God and believe in our Lord Jesus.

21 But now I am going to Jerusalem, chained by the Spirit, without knowing what will happen to me there. Yet in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that imprisonment and troubles await me. Indeed 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.

23 Paul 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.

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

28 Keep 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. I know that after I leave, ruthless wolves will come among you and not spare the flock. And from among you, some will arise corrupting the truth and inducing the disciples to follow them.

31 Be on the watch, therefore, remembering that for three years, night and day, I did not cease to warn everyone even with tears. Now 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.

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

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

On to Jerusalem

1 When 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. There we found a ship that made for Phoenicia; we went aboard and set sail. We 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. There we found the disciples and stayed a week. Warned by the Spirit, they told Paul not to go to Jerusalem.

But 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. After that we said good-bye to one another; we boarded the ship and they returned home.

We continued our journey, sailing from Tyre to Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and spent a day with them. On 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 and had four unmarried daughters who were gifted with prophecy.

discourse of Samuel (1 S 12:3). How quickly can a person be self-serving and look after self in any apostolic work.

The text also mentions the “bishops” (that word means inspectors). We do not know if they are the elders themselves, or only some of them, those with greater responsibility.

Paul goes up to Jerusalem, and manifestations of the Spirit follow. Paul is warned that he should not go, and this happens when he himself leaves chained by the Spirit (20:22) that means without the possibility of making any other decision. It is the right moment to see how the Spirit of God is one with the spirit of the person he inspires: those who warn Paul know and declare that he will meet with trouble and they would not want it. Paul knows and he wants it. Today, such manifestations are not part of the ordinary experience of Christians, with the exception of certain charismatic groups. Yet on looking into the subject it would seem that many people do receive such warnings but attach little importance to them.

The Spirit passes through our spirit as does light through thick colored glass and takes its color. Many manifestations that certain people seek are current mainly in primitive religions, even the non-Christian; must we take it that they are the most desirable religious experiences? However, if the Spirit of God wills to use our parapsychological senses to let us feel his presence in this firmly closed fortress that we call “our own self” and where we pretend to be the only rulers, “Praise the Lord! Alleluia.” Let him have us speak in tongues, laugh and cry, if such breaks the ice and opens the doors of our reason that has already seemingly known everything.

A good number of Christians make fun of such happenings. They are free to believe or not: there are so many illusions and much charlatanism. All they have to do is to ask themselves whether or not they are systematically denying any divine manifestation in a world we believe we know well, through human experience. If God no longer has the right to intervene in a world given up to reason and the laws of science, how can there be a true and trustful communion with him?

That is important. Whoever renounces and gives self to God sees the Spirit becoming more and more active in her life, not through visions and marvels, but through silent inspiration. This becomes so habitual that a person cannot live without it and knows through experience that the inner inspiration is right even though reason suggests another way of acting. Such a person mistrusts her own projects and follows this spiritual instinct.

The primitive Church had its prophets, but always wanted community discernment to judge whether it was truly God’s Spirit (1 Cor 14:29; 1 Thes 5:21; 1 Jn 4:1-3). The Bible already spoke of prophets who spoke without being sent, or dreamed what they wanted to dream (Jer 29:16). The account of the journey helps us to get an idea of how these first communities welcomed brothers and sisters from other parts at a time when communication was limited. Besides, would there have been a Eucharistic
10 We 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.”

12 When we heard this, we, together with these people of Caesarea, begged Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. 13 Then 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.”

14 When he would not be persuaded, we gave up and said, “The Lord’s will be done.”

15 After this we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. 16 With us were some of the disciples of Caesarea, begged Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. 13 Then 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.”

16 Then do as we tell you. There are four men among us who have made a vow. 24 Take 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.

25 As 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.”

26 So the next day Paul took the men; he purified himself with them 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.

Paul is received by the Church of Jerusalem

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

celebration with these foreigners without at least asking about themselves and their Church? It was quite different when apostles or prophets were passing by for then they were granted manifestations of the Spirit, with a more developed knowledge of the Word, as well as news of the universal Church.

• 17 The Christians of Jewish origin praise Paul when he gets to Jerusalem but, at the same time, they humiliate him. There is a rumor among them that Paul, besides not imposing the Judaic Law on Christian converts from paganism, also suggests that the Jews abandon the Law. They asked him to prove his fidelity to the past by becoming godfather to a few believers who had made a fairly costly vow – because if Paul had come from the Greeks, he would have money and could pay well!

Those who insist are the elders working with James “the brother of the Lord”: all are Jews from Palestine who, in spite of their faith, are still attached to the customs of the Old Testament.

They point out the importance of the Jerusalem community: thousands of Jews in order to make their demands respected. They may still have been more numerous than the Christians in the pagan world: this was the inheritance of the past. Paul accepts for the sake of peace, but it will be his downfall.

• 27 There are several similarities between
saw Paul in the Temple, began to stir up the whole crowd. They seized him shouting, “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.” They said this because earlier they had seen Trophimus, an Ephesian, with Paul in the city and they thought that Paul had taken him into the Temple.

Then 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.

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

On seeing him with the soldiers, the crowd stopped beating Paul. The 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. But 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.

When Paul reached the steps, he actually had to be carried up by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob, for a multitude of people followed shouting, “Kill him!”

Just 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! Are you not the Egyptian, then, who caused a riot some time ago and let a band of four thousand terrorists out into the desert?” Paul answered, “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. So 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.

**Paul addresses the Jews**

1 “Brothers and fathers, listen to what I have to say to you in my defense.” 2 When 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.

4 As for this way, I persecuted it to the point of death and arrested its followers. Paul’s arrested and Stephen’s a few years before (see 6:9). The Jews from Asia draw up several accusations: the most serious one being that Paul brought an “uncircumcised” man into the Temple; this profanation was punishable by death. This is the man who is spreading his teaching everywhere against our people, our law and this Sanctuary. There were similar accusations against Christ and Stephen.

This is a false accusation. Nevertheless, the Jews are not totally wrong: through his teachings, Paul forms Christians who replace the Temple worship with faith in Christ; they replace the Law with a life of obedience to the Spirit and Jewish nationalism with universal Christian community.

The Roman troops occupying Jerusalem and seeking order were stationed in a fortress adjacent to the Temple and overlooking it. Thanks to this, the soldiers were able to intervene before Paul met the same fate as Stephen.

1 Paul here gives personal witness. He will stress he is still faithful to the religion of his fathers: but he has not been able to prevent Christ, the Lord, from imposing himself on him. Paul will quote Gamaliel (Acts 5:34); and then a Christian Jew very faithful to the Law, Ananias (v. 12). The crowd listens. The reaction comes when Paul says that the pagans will share the privileges of the Jews. The pagans: our enemies, impure people and enemies of God! The same affirmation had been decisive in the condemnation of Jesus (Mt 21:42).
ers, both men and women, throwing them into prison.

5 The 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. 6 But as I was traveling along, nearing Damascus, at about noon a great light from the sky suddenly flashed about me. 7 I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me: ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ 8 I answered: ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said to me: ‘I am Jesus the Nazarene whom you persecute.’ 9 The men who were with me saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. 10 I 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.’ 11 Yet the brightness of that light had blinded me and so I was led by the hand into Damascus by my companions.

12 There 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. 13 As he stood by me, he said: ‘Brother Saul, recover your sight.’ At that moment I could see and I looked at him. 14 He 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. 15 From now on you shall be his witness before all the pagan peoples and tell them all that you have seen and heard. 16 And now, why delay? Get up and be baptized and have your sins washed away by calling upon his Name.’

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

22 Up 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!” 23 They were screaming and waving their cloaks and throwing dust into the air. 24 So 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.

25 But 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?”

26 On hearing this the officer went to the commander and said, “What are you doing? That man is a Roman citizen.”

27 So the commander came and asked him, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?” “Yes,” answered Paul. 28 The commander then said, “It cost me a large sum of money to become a Roman citizen.”

29 Then 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

30 The 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.
down and rescue him from their midst and take him back to the fortress.

11 That 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.”

The plot to kill Paul

12 When it was day, certain Jews formed a conspiracy: they bound themselves by an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. 13 There were more than forty of them who joined in this conspiracy.

14 They 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. Now 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.”

16 But the son of Paul’s sister heard about the planned ambush, so he went to the headquarters and informed Paul.

17 Paul sent for one of the officers and said, “Take this young man to the commander for he has something to report to him.”

18 So 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.”

19 The commander took him by the hand and drawing him aside asked him privately, “What is it that you have to
The 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. 21 But 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.” 22 The commander let the boy go with this advice, “Do not tell anyone that you gave me this information.”

**Paul is transferred to Caesarea**

23 Then 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. 24 Provide horses also for Paul to ride, so that he may be brought safely to Felix the governor.” 25 He then wrote the governor a letter to this effect:

26 “Claudius Lysias greets the Most Excellent Governor Felix and communicates to him the following: 27 The 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. 28 As I wanted to know what charge they had against him, I presented him before the Sanhedrin 29 and I discovered that the accusation related to matters of their Law, but there was nothing that deserved death or imprisonment. 30 When 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.”

31 The soldiers acted in accordance with these instructions. They took Paul and brought him to Antipatris by night. 32 On the following day, they returned to the fortress but the horsemen continued journeying with him. 33 Upon entering Caesarea they handed the letter to the governor and presented Paul to him. 34 When Felix had read the letter, he asked Paul from which province he was, and when he learned that Paul was from Cilicia, 35 he 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.

**The case before Felix**

1 After 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. 2 Paul 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. 4 So as not to take more of your time, I beg you to listen briefly to us with your usual kindness. 5 We have found that this man is a pest, he creates division among the Jews throughout the world and is a leader of the Nazarene sect. 6 He even tried to profane the Temple, so we seized him. We would have judged him according to our law, 7 but Lysias the commander intervened in a very violent way and took him from us. 8 Then 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.” 9 The Jews confirmed this, firmly maintaining that all this was so. 10 Then 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. 11 You yourself can ascertain that not more than twelve days ago I
went up to Jerusalem to worship, 12 and 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. 13 So they cannot prove the things of which they now accuse me.

14 But 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, 15 and 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. 16 So I strive always to have a clear conscience before God and before people.

17 After many years, I came to bring help to those of my nation and to offer sacrifices. 18 On 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 19 who ought to be here before you to accuse me, if they have anything against me. 20 Let 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 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.

The trial before Festus

25 Three days after Festus arrived in the province, he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem. 2 There the chief priests and the elders accused Paul again. 3 In 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. 4 Festus 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.”

6 Festus 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. 7 When Paul arrived, the Jews who came from Jerusalem stood around him and presented many serious charges that they could not prove. 8 Paul 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.”

9 Then Festus, who wanted to please the Jews, asked Paul: “Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem to be tried before me?” 10 Paul 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. 11 If 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.”

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

13 Some 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. 15 When I was in Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews accused him and asked me to sentence him. 16 I 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. 17 So they came and I took my seat without delay on the tribunal and sent for the man.

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

22 Agrippa said to Festus: “I would like to hear that man.” Festus answered him: “Tomorrow you shall.”

23 On 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. 25 I, 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. 26 Well, 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. 27 For it seems absurd to me to send a prisoner without indicating the charges against him.”

Paul’s speech before King Agrippa

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1 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, 3 for you are an expert in the customs of the Jews and their disputes. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

4 All the Jews know how I have lived among them from my youth up to this present time, 5 being a Pharisee, as all the Jews are by birth; I was brought up in the strict observance of the law of Moses; 6 and I was zealous for the traditions of my fathers, so much so that I persecuted those who followed Christ. 7 As I was on my way and drew near Jerusalem, I was going to change the city and take my life as a testimony for the Jews. 8 But it did not seem right to me to do this; for I did not think that I had seen any sign of Christ. 9 Therefore I tried to kill him; 10 and in the temple they were about to kill me when Paul appeared. 11 I was actually standing in the temple with a group of soldiers, who were about to take him to the place of judgment, 12 when I gave him the signal with two other men to kill him. But this signal was not given in accordance with the law. 13 So I had to account for my motives to myself, as one who was going to make a defense before the Romans. 14 For this reason I have nowhere refused to give an answer to this nation, though they have asked me to speak to their council.

15 Paul, I want to speak to you about these matters that are under discussion among Jews, 16 and I am prepared to spend and be spent for your sake, for your spiritual welfare. 17 It is not to proclaim oneself a Jew; all had to convert. And here, Paul speaks openly before this audience who are not outstanding in their moral virtue, except perhaps the Roman Festus. 18 That the Messiah would rise from the dead. Here again is the decisive point. Paul questions the religion of many Christians, who, according to polls accept Christ as Word of God but do not believe in the resurrection. Something beyond death? Perhaps… “I am not like those who think they know everything, I’m searching…” Precisely, as long as we are searching we have not taken the leap of faith. To accept Christ, is to renounce the totalitarian reason with its proven truths. Reason is at home in science and...
from my youth, how I have lived among my own people and in Jerusalem. 5 They 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. 6 If I am now tried here, it is because of the hope I have in the promise made by God to our ancestors. 7 The 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! 8 But why refuse to believe that God raises the dead?

9 I myself in the beginning thought that I had to use all possible means to counteract the Name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 This 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.

11 I 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.

12 With this purpose in mind I went to Damascus with full authority and commissioned by the chief priests. 13 On 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. 14 We 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.’

15 I answered: ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said: ‘I am Jesus whom you persecute.’ Get 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. 17 I will rescue you from all evil that may come from your own people or from the pagans to whom I am sending you. 18 For 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.’

19 Since that time, King Agrippa, I did not stray from this heavenly vision; 20 on 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. 21 I 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.

22 I do not teach anything other than what Moses and the Prophets announced beforehand: 23 the 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.”

24 As 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!” 25 But Paul answered: “I am not mad, Most Excellent Festus, but everything I have said is reliable and true. 26 The king is acquainted with all these things, so to him I speak with such confidence. I am convinced that he knows everything about himself as he is about convincing others: Agrippa and Festus are people like everyone else and they need Christ. Festus is amazed by Paul’s biblical background and his enthusiasm: Agrippa, moved, says nothing. In fact, if they have been impressed, uneasiness will soon pass: “serious matters” will again take up their time.
In this case, for these things did not happen in a dark corner. 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do."

28 Agrippa said to him: "You almost believe that you have already made me a Christian!" 29 Paul 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."

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

Departure for Rome

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

7 We 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. 8 We turned with difficulty and arrived at a place called Good Ports, near the city of Lasea.

9 Time passed and the crossing began to be dangerous: we had already celebrated the feast of the Fast. 10 Then 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." 11 But the Roman officer relied more on the ship's captain and the owner of the ship than on the words of Paul. 12 And 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

13 Then 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. 14 But a little later, a strong wind called "the northeaster" swept down on them, from across the island. 15 The ship was dragged along and could not face the wind, so that we remained adrift.

16 As we were crossing under the lee of the small island of Cauda, we managed – but with effort – to secure the lifeboat. 17 After 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 plentiful details: what a contrast with the account of Jonah and the tempest, written doubtless by someone who had never sailed. It is obvious that Paul was familiar with this kind of journeying: in 2 Cor 11:25, he states having been shipwrecked three times. Paul's inner strength stands out in the description of the storm: Paul knows he is to testify before the tribunal of the emperor.
anchor. So we continued to be dragged along.
18 The storm lashed at us so strongly that on the next day they began throwing the cargo overboard. 19 On the third day the sailors with their own hands threw out the ship’s gear. 20 For several days neither the sun nor the stars could be seen, and the tempest had not subsided: we lost all hope of saving ourselves.
21 As 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. 22 But now I invite you to regain courage for no one among you shall die; only the ship shall be destroyed. 23 Last night there appeared to me an angel of my God to whom I serve, 24 and 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.’
25 Have courage, therefore, my friends, for I trust in God that it will be just as he told me. 26 But we have to run aground on some island.”
27 Near midnight on the fourteenth night, as we were drifting in the Adriatic Sea, the sailors suspected that land was near. 28 They 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. 29 They feared that we might hit some rocks, so they cast out four anchors from the stern and waited anxiously for morning. 30 Then 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. 31 But Paul said to the captain and to the soldiers: “If they leave the ship, you cannot be saved. 32 So the soldiers cut the mooring cables of the boat and let it fall.
33 As they waited for dawn, Paul urged everyone: “For fourteen days you have not eaten anything because of anxious waiting. 34 I ask you to eat now if you want to live; be sure that not even a hair of your head will be lost.” 35 Having said this, he took bread, gave thanks to God in everybody’s presence, broke it and began to eat. 36 All were encouraged and they too ate. 37 They were two hundred and seventy-six persons in all. 38 When they had eaten enough, they threw the wheat into the sea to lighten the boat.
39 When 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. 40 They 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. 41 But 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.
42 The soldiers then planned to kill the prisoners for fear that some of them might escape by swimming. 43 But 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, 44 and the rest to hold on to planks or pieces of the ship. So all of us reached land safe and sound.

On Malta

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

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*28.1 Paul almost perished at sea; on approaching the shore he narrowly escaped being butchered by his guards, and then the episode of the viper: see the promises of Jesus in Mk 16:17-18. Note the first gesture of Paul on arriving at a place the Gospel had not yet reached: he will
Paul 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. When 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.” But Paul shook off the viper into the fire and did not suffer any harm. They waited to see him swell and die; but 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.

Near this place was an estate owned by the head of the island, named Publius. For three days this man welcomed us hospitably. It 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. Because of this, the rest of the sick people on the island came to see him and were cured. So they showered us with kindness, and on our departure they provided us with everything we needed.

From Malta to Rome

After 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. We sailed for Syracuse, staying there for three days and, 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, where we found some of our brothers who invited us to stay with them for a week. And that was how we came to Rome.

There 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. Upon 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.

Paul meets the Jews in Rome

After 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 military governor but permitted Paul to lodge in a private house with the soldier who guarded him.

Luke wished to end his book with the account of this meeting. Here Paul repeats almost all that he said when he first preached at Antioch of Pisidia (13:46-47): the Gospel is to be first preached to the Jews, but if they reject it, that will not prevent the word of God being proclaimed to all the nations.

Without any hindrance. That is the last word: the Gospel has gone out to conquer and nothing will stop it (Rev 6:2). Paul remained two whole years in this house, that is to say, in partial captivity: it was the delay fixed by the law for preventive detention. It is most probable that all ended with a not proven verdict. Some authors, in a hurry to consider as fables elements given in the Pastoral Letters on a later activity of Paul, assert that he was then condemned to death. There is no reason why Luke would have hidden it; it is still less probable when Luke alludes to a change of residence.
Romans. 18 They examined me and wanted to set me free, for they saw nothing in my case that deserved death. 19 But the Jews objected, so I was forced to appeal to Caesar without the least intention of bringing any case against my own people. 20 Therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I bear these chains.”

21 They 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. 22 But we wish to hear from you what you think, although we know already that everywhere people speak against this sect that you belong to.”

23 They 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. 24 Some were convinced by his words, others were not. 25 Finally 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 this 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 this people has 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.

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

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