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The Acts of the Apostles

Chapter 4

Review from Chapter 2:40-47

- The Jews who were convicted by St. Peter's sermon on their complicity in putting the Christ to death and not recognizing God's salvation through the Messiah, were instructed by the Apostle to do 3 things: 1) repent, 2) be baptized, 3) receive the Holy Spirit.
- As a result of the above, we read that 3,000 "gladly received his word and were baptized."
- This practice continues in the Orthodox Church to this day: those who wish to be saved repent, confessing their sins and changing their mind and heart (Gk. *Metanoia*), are baptized and then "sealed" (Eph. 1:13) by the Holy Spirit (Chrismation).

"They did not say, How shall we be saved? But, 'What shall we do?'... 'Repent,' says he, 'and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ.' (v. 38) He does not yet say, 'Believe,' but, 'Be baptized every one of you.' For this they received in baptism." (St. John Chrysostom, Homily VII on Acts 2:37)

- The worship of the early Orthodox Church is characterized by: 1) adherence to the Apostles' doctrines and teaching, 2) Eucharistic fellowship (Gk. *koinonia*) and communion, 3) the prayers.
- "The prayers" (Gk. ταῖς προσευχαῖς) in verse 42 connotes liturgical (specific) prayers that helped form and maintain the unity of the faith, teaching, and doctrines of the nascent Church regarding the Truth of Christ as He had revealed it to His Apostles.
- As a result, we see the faithful "continuing daily with one accord" (v. 46) and adding to those being saved, that is, receiving baptism.
- The Apostles Peter and John heal the lame man in the Name of Jesus Christ, thereby demonstrating that though Christ has ascended in glory, His presence and ministry continues through His Apostles and their successors in the Church (in keeping with Christ's words in Jn 14:12).
- By his own volition, the formerly lame man follows the Apostles into the Temple to worship God.
- The Apostles glorify God (II Thes. 1:10) as the Source of this man's healing and identify Jesus Christ⁹ as the "Author of Life" (v. 15), Who defeated death and in whose Name the lame man was healed.
- In convicting the Jews present of killing "the Author of Life" St. Peter also offers them a way of redemption through repentance.

Chapter 4

Verses 1-22

- Q: Why are the Sadducees 'disturbed' by the preaching and teaching of the Apostles?
- Q: What is the tenor of the Apostles' response to the Jewish authorities after being arrested? How do they respond (vv. 8-12)?
- Q: What is significant in St. Peter's usage in verse 11 of Psalm 117:22, "This is the stone which the builders rejected, which has become the chief cornerstone"?
- Q: What is remarkable in the Apostles' proclamation of the Gospel to the Jewish authorities here?

“Neither is there salvation in any other, (v.12) Peter says. What wounds, think you, must these words inflict on them! ‘For there is no other name,’ he continues, ‘under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.’” (St. John Chrysostom, Homily X on Acts 4:1)

Q: How do the Jewish authorities inadvertently testify to the power of the Holy Spirit?

“Behold another miracle not less than the former. ‘And beholding the boldness of Peter and John’... For not only their words; their very bearing showed it; that they should stand there so intrepidly to be tried in a cause like this, and with uttermost peril impending over them! Not only by their words, but by their gesture also, and their look and voice, and, in short, by everything about them, they manifested the boldness with which they confronted the people.” (Ibid.)

Q: What does the reasoning of the Jewish authorities in response to the “notable miracle” in verse 16 reveal about those in authority?

Q: What was the objective in arresting the Apostles, bringing them to be questioned in their midst, and threatening them (v. 21)?

Q: What can we learn from the Apostles’ response to the Jewish authorities in verses 19-20?

Q: What are we to understand by the detail given us of the formerly lame man’s age (v. 22)?

Verses 23-31

Q: Who is being persecuted and threatened by the Jewish authorities?

Q: What can we learn from the Apostles’ actions upon their return to the assembly of the believers?

Q: How does God respond to their prayers and why in such a way?

Q: What does it mean in verse 31 that “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit”? Had they and others newly baptized not already received the Holy Spirit?

“He looks on the earth, and it trembles; He touches the hills, and they smoke.” (Ps. 103:32 LXX)

Q: What were the hallmarks of the answered prayer and strengthening (inflaming) of the Holy Spirit (verses 32-37)?

“This was the proof that they were heard, and of His visitation. ‘And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.’ What means, ‘They were filled?’ It means, They were inflamed; and the Gift burned up within them. ‘ And they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul.’” (St. John Chrysostom, Homily XI on Acts 4:23)

Q: What characterizes giving and offering in the early Orthodox Church? What can we learn from this for the Church today?