

During the Easter season, one of the readings is generally (if not always) from The Acts of the Apostles for both weekdays and Sundays. Why? What is this book? Why did our Lord will this book to be written, for all ages until the end of time? What is the thrust of it? What is it that our Lord wants communicate to us and why does the Church see the Easter season as a particularly fitting time to read The Acts of the Apostles?

God is the first author of all of Sacred Scripture. What He did, though, was “inspire” human authors to actually do the writing. “Inspired” means that God overshadowed them in such a way that they wrote *all* that God wanted written and *only* what He wanted written. St Luke, the human author of the third Gospel is also the human author of The Acts of the Apostle (which will be referred to at times as just “Acts” for short). Luke is the only human author of Sacred Scripture that was a Gentile – not Jewish. He was a companion of St Paul and traveled with him. His Gospel also indicates a close connection to our Holy Mother.

Luke starts Acts by saying: In the first book ..., referring to the Gospel he wrote. He then goes into the Ascension. So what is this book for? Well our Lord came, completed His redemptive work (as recorded in the Gospel), and then ascended into Heaven. So now what?? The Acts of the Apostles addresses that question. Our Lord entrusted the building up of the Kingdom of Heaven to His Church, and He entrusted His Church to the Apostles and their successors. Thus, The Acts of the Apostles is relating the beginning of the Church and what the Apostles did. Our Lord impressed Himself on the Apostles in such a way that they carried the fullness of Revelation within themselves. Thus, what the Apostles did and didn’t do in regard to the faith is telling us the will of God. So what’s happened? Our Lord brought the fullness of Revelation, but then He ascended into Heaven. Now what? Our Lord prepared the Apostles to carry out His will. So what do we do? We look to the Apostles and do whatever they did or instructed – hence the book: The Acts of the Apostles. One commentary calls Acts “the Practical Gospel.” What it means is precisely what has already been stated: our Lord taught and established what we need to get to Heaven; Acts is now showing how that is to be lived out, in addition to (or by) giving us an account of the very beginnings of the Church.

A couple of things this book brings out is the papacy, the authority that God/our Lord has given to the Apostles, as well as Apostolic succession, thus perpetuating the authority and responsibility given to the Apostles. In fact, one of the first things St Luke records, straightaway away in Chapter 1, is Apostolic succession – with the election of Matthias to the 12. And who was it that called for and led this election to replace Judas Iscariot? It was our first Pope – St Peter. At the Council of Jerusalem, there is debate, debate, debate then Peter speaks and then... the debate is over; after that there is discussion about what to do and so on, but the debate is over after Peter speaks. Thus, we immediately see the exercise of the papacy, the one visible head of the Church – *visible* head; of course our Lord is *the* Head.

But is all of this real? Is it really what our Lord willed? Did the Apostles really enact what our Lord willed? How can we know? Well what evidence did our Lord provide for His Divinity? There were 2 things: 1) the many prophecies (or predictions) that He fulfilled, and 2) His great manifestations of power, the miracles which John called signs, things that were well beyond human power and thus signs of His Divinity. So how does our Lord confirm the works (or acts) of the Apostles? Through prophecies fulfilled and through signs, things that are well beyond human power. Right before His Passion, our Lord told the Apostles that they would do greater works than they have seen even Him do. This prophecy was fulfilled multiple times in multiple ways. One example came immediately after Pentecost. Peter gave one homily and 3,000 repented and were baptized. The faith spread far and wide, in spite of severe persecution. Many of the disciples withstood torture and execution. And then there was the conversion of the Pharisee who was breathing out murderous threats against the Christians, dragging men and women from their homes, and who led the execution of St Stephen – namely Saul, the future St Paul. How can this happen? And then there were manifestations of power – signs – things well beyond human power. The day of Pentecost itself was one. A strong wind comes, the Apostles throw open the doors to the Upper Room, come out and preach and each person hears them in his own native language. People were astounded. Peter and John healed the crippled man at the gate of the Temple, just one of many healings. People placed the infirm near where Peter would be walking because even his shadow would heal. The

Apostles were miraculously delivered from prison. Why these miraculous events? They are signs. It is our Lord confirming the Acts of the Apostles – letting *us* know: yes, this is what I established, this is My will.

The Acts of the Apostles has also been called “The Book of the Acts of the Holy Spirit” because it shows the action of God’s Spirit in our Lord’s Church. It starts with the great manifestation at Pentecost. But it is observed especially in the work of the Apostles, the conversions that came about, and the capacity to teach. Do we think this has stopped? To whatever extent it is lacking, it is not a lack or unwillingness on the part of God, but rather a failure in the human dimension of the Church to respond.

Our Lord’s Church is attacked from so many directions and people are so easily pulled away. This is a good part of the reason it is helpful to be familiar with Acts. As we see what is in Acts, we can readily say: No, these accusations against the Church are blatantly false. Yes, our Lord did establish a Church, He did establish the papacy and the leadership of the Church, He did establish teaching authority in His Church, He did establish Apostolic succession, and we see it being lived out from the beginning, confirmed by our Lord with great works and signs of great power.

The Acts of the Apostles records and tells about the conversion of St Paul. It is in Acts that we hear about our Lord telling Paul that he is hurting himself by kicking the goad. How easy it is to kick the goad by rebelling against our Lord and His Church. Can we not bow humbly before His teachings and the instructions of His Church? Can we not treat Him with dignity and honor, especially in His own house, in His actual physical presence? When our Lord said to Saul-Paul: it hurts you to kick the goad, He is saying it to us as well.

The humility of the Apostles is seen in Acts. They don’t think they are owed something, they do not seek worldly glory or recognition, they are happy and honored serving the Lord. Peter and John were flogged by the Sanhedrin and left rejoicing. We also see, though, that humility does not preclude complete confidence, in fact it nourishes it. The Apostles are enlivened, not depressed or timid, and they have complete and absolute confidence in what they say and do. And why wouldn’t they since they have united themselves to our Lord and thus to absolute Truth and infinite power, which is not only guiding them but actually acting through them. This is available to all, but a person cannot receive if they turn up their nose and kick the goad.

In the Acts of the Apostles we see the willingness to suffer for our Lord. Do I have that kind of love for our Lord? Am I that strongly drawn to everlasting life, or am I hampered with attachments to this life and this world? So often people are just looking for good feelings – something transient. How about something of real substance, something that will endure even beyond death? So often people, with their minds locked onto this world and this life first and foremost, reduce God to something like a genie in a bottle, just someone to grant my wishes and desires for the here and now. That is not the way of our fathers in faith. They were compelled by love of God. Am I? So often we cave into denying our Lord with just the slightest pressure – what will people think is all too often enough to control us and turn us away. Is that life? Is that love of God? It’s not the faith of our fathers as clearly seen in the Acts of the Apostles.

Are you interested in working with and for our Lord like our fathers? If not, why not? Are you not interested in participating in the Heavenly Kingdom? If you are, you might take note of some of the methods of the Apostles. The Apostles, our fathers, got started by going to familiar places where people gathered. In the very early going they went, for example, to Solomon’s portico (part of the Temple) to preach. They were arrested and put in jail for preaching about Christ, which they simply accepted. How about us? What about our own gatherings and familiar places? Do we stand up for the Lord, for what is right and good and true, for religious practice? There is also a certain simplicity about their preaching and teaching: this is the truth, period. Are we afraid of “clever” arguments or accusations or mockery? If so, why do we not believe?

The Church holds up the Acts of the Apostles during the Easter season for a reason. The Easter season holds before us our Lord’s promise of a glorious Resurrection for those who bind themselves to Him, who forge a relation of love with Him, in this life. How to do that? What is the path? The Acts of the Apostles clearly confirms our Lord’s answer to that: I abide with My Church, abide there and learn the way.

*God bless you, Fr Kuhn*