

The Book of Acts



**Church of the HOLY SPIRIT in
Milan, built by Rosminian Fathers
in 1970s**

The EUCHARIST.

Rosmini Centre, 19th March 2019

St. Joseph

A Model of Church for Today

Problems and difficulties in the Church are not new. From the times of JESUS the BOAT of PETER has seen many stormy periods.

Today, many are worried. They see the current situation as apocalyptic, the breaking down of Christian societies, Christian values, Christian traditions to a most dangerous level.

It is good to go back to the first book on the CHURCH, to see what the Church is all about, to discern what are the means at our disposal to overcome difficult times.

Certainly, the starting point is the immense joy of the RESURRECTION, and the desire to proclaim it to the whole world, supported by the power BAPTISM and of the EUCHARIST which builds up the Body of Christ.

KERYGMA comes first: proclaim the Gospel joyfully

KOINONIA comes second: build up strong truly Christian communities around Mary, Peter, the Apostles, the faithful, holding to the depositum fidei.

DIAKONIA is next: service, ministering, washing each other's feet, from the Pope to the last Christian.

ACTS

“You shall be my witnesses in JERUSALEM, in SAMARIA, and to the END OF THE EARTH”

1-12: Peter's Ministry and with him the ministry of John, James, Stephen, Barnabas, Philip, and others.

13-20: Paul's conversion and ministry. Three Missionary Journeys with Barnabas, Titus, Timothy, Silas, Luke.

15: The Council of Jerusalem

21-28: Paul in prison, in Jerusalem, Caesarea, Rome



WOUNDS OF THE CHURCH TODAY

1. ABUSE SCANDAL
2. COVER-UP BY BISHOPS/PRIESTS?
3. HOMOSEXUAL LOBBIES AMONG BISHOPS/PRIESTS??
4. LIBERALISM AMONG BISHOPS ON DOCTRINAL, LITURGICAL, MORAL ISSUES. Examples: Eucharist to divorced and civilly re-married, lax forms of liturgies, status of 'deaconesses in early church', ecumenism interpreted as the blurring of theological doctrines for the sake of brotherhood, etc.
5. ROSMINI's WOUNDS: Inadequate participation in the liturgy by both clergy and people; insufficient preparation of the clergy; divisions among the Bishops; no participation of local clergy and lay people in the choice of local Bishops; unfair distribution of the Church's wealth.
6. OTHER WOUNDS.....??

THE CHURCH IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

1. **SPIRIT-DRIVEN**: huge presence and activity of the SPIRIT – LISTENING TO THE VOICE OF THE SPIRIT guiding the Church. Examples: in Jerusalem, in Samaria, in Antioch, in Troas, etc.
2. **POWERFUL CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP**: the faithful gathered around MARY, the APOSTLES, the DISCIPLES of JESUS. ONE IN MIND – ONE IN HEART - CATECHESIS
3. BELIEVERS **'CONSTANTLY IN PRAYER'** – see example when Peter was in prison
4. CENTRALITY OF THE **EUCCHARIST** – BREAKING OF BREAD
5. IMPORTANCE OF **BAPTISM** as INCORPORATION IN THE CHURCH – BODY OF CHRIST
6. **KOINONIA – KERYGMA – DIAKONIA**
7. FUNDAMENTAL **ROLE OF THE LAITY**
8. ATTENTION TO THE **DEPOSITUM FIDEI**: see Paul asking Peter, James and John if the gospel he preached was the true gospel. See also Paul in Galatians: “Even if an Angel should preach a gospel different from what you have received let him be anathema!”
9. REAL, PRACTICAL **CONCERN FOR THE POOR**



When St. Luke wrote his gospel and Acts he used documents and interviewed eyewitnesses; it is very likely that he interviewed **Mary, the Mother of JESUS**, for example.

He was a **doctor** by profession, "**my dear friend Luke, the physician**", St. Paul calls him [Colossians 4,14]. He was a companion of St. Paul and took part in many of the events described in Acts [see the "**we**" passages: Acts 16,10; 20,5; 21,1 etc.).

Few scholars today would doubt the historicity of Acts; most of them agree that St. Luke wrote the book of Acts before 70AD and perhaps during St. Paul's imprisonment in Rome (61-63AD).



St LUKE, the beloved physician

For St. Luke, the whole history of mankind can be divided into three periods:

- 1 - The time of the Old Testament Prophets (from Adam to John the Baptist);
- 2- The time of JESUS on earth, 7BC - 30AD, the centre of history;
- 3- The time of the Holy Spirit and the Church, from Pentecost until today and till the end of time.

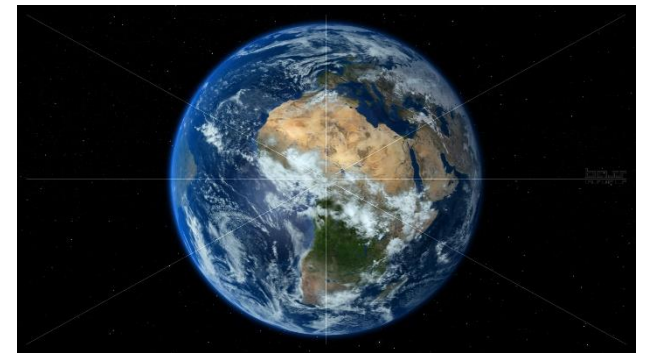
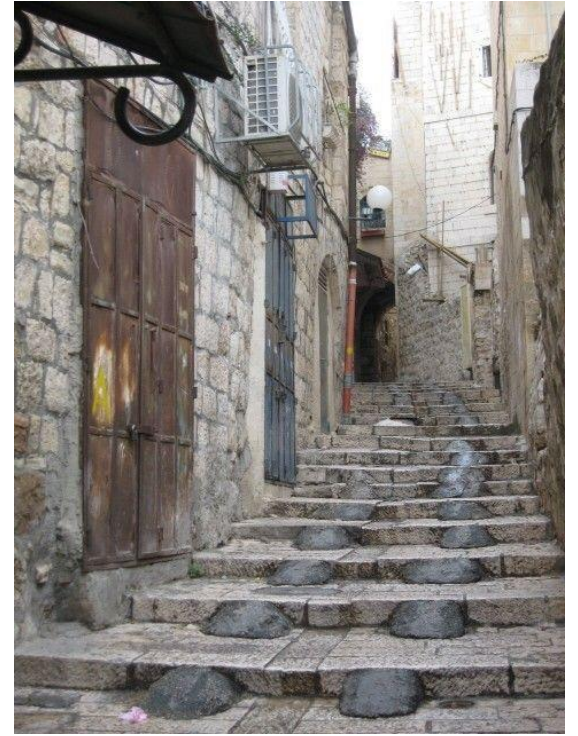
Acts deals with the first 30 years of the life of the Church: from the Ascension of JESUS (30AD) to the first imprisonment of St. Paul in Rome (61-63AD).



ACTS is the story of the fulfilment of JESUS' words before ascending to Heaven:

**“YOU SHALL BE MY WITNESSES BOTH
IN JERUSALEM, AND IN ALL OF
JUDEA AND SAMARIA, TO THE END
OF THE WORLD”**

(Acts 1,8).



WITNESSES IN JERUSALEM ACTS 1 – 12

UPPER ROOM: the Meeting Room of early Christians, the house of Mary, mother of JOHN MARK

120 Followers of JESUS, in constant prayer with MARY, the MOTHER of JESUS

Election of MATTHIAS, witness of the Ministry, Passion, Death, Resurrection

PENTECOST, “the rush of mighty wind, the tongues of fire”, POWER of GOD

THE BIRTH of the CHURCH, 3000 baptized

ONE in HEART – ONE in MIND

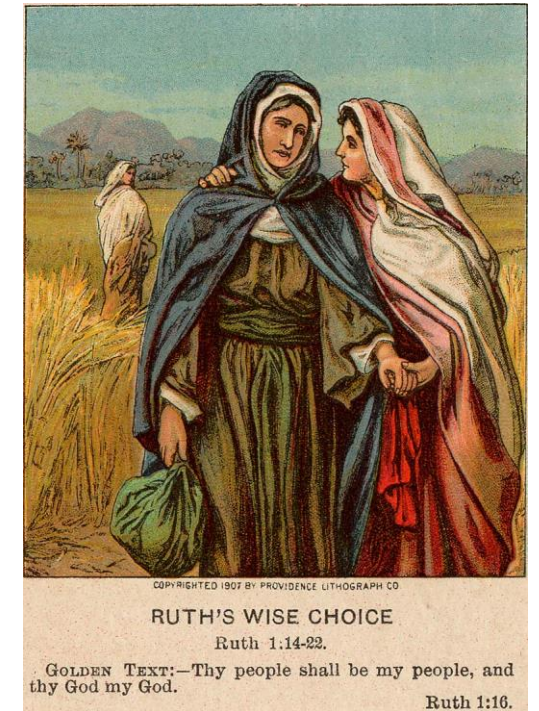
“Devoted to the teaching of the Apostles, to fellowship, to the
Breaking of Bread”

The Jews celebrate Pentecost "seven weeks" after the Passover, as commanded by God in the Scriptures. At the time of JESUS it was a "pilgrim" festival [i.e. all Jews went to Jerusalem to worship in the Temple], to thank God for the first harvest and also for the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses.

Christian Pentecost completes the Jewish Pentecost: the Holy Spirit renders the abundance of the harvest of salvation possible and it is He who writes into our hearts the new Law of love for God and our neighbour.

The coming of the Holy Spirit is a manifestation of power: the "rush of a mighty wind" filled the house and could be heard all around the surrounding area [see v.6]; the tongues of fires "distributed and resting on each one of them" communicated supernatural courage, wisdom, understanding, love... [do you still remember the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit?

Here's the list: **Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, Fear of the LORD**; the Holy Spirit also communicated the gift of speaking in tongues, and the many charisms that accompanied the Apostles' missionary work.



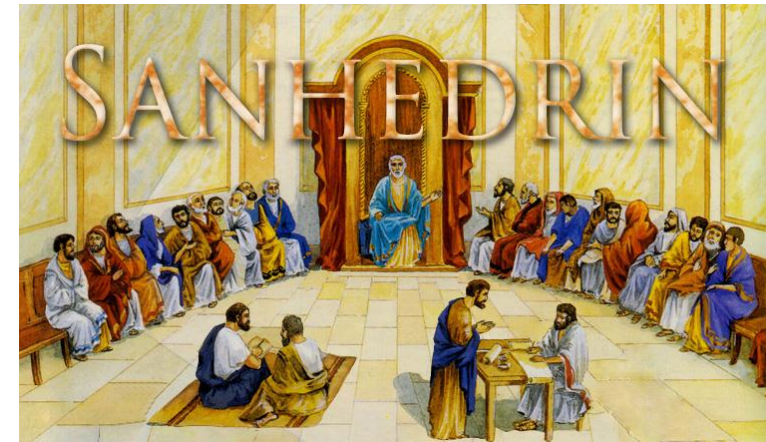
PETER and JOHN go to the TEMPLE for prayer and heal the man lame from birth

“Silver or gold we do not have, but what we have we give you: In the Name of JESUS, stand up and walk!”

They witnessed before the same SANHEDRIN that condemned JESUS. The SANHEDRIN command the Apostles **not to speak about the NAME of JESUS.**

The SANHEDRINS of TODAY?

When they are set free, return to the Upper Room, where the Church is in prayer, and are strengthened again by the HOLY SPIRIT.



The strange story of ANANIAS and SAPPHIRA

Their sin was “vain-glory”, lying to the Holy Spirit.

Money and Church
don't mix.



Biblical scholars are generally agreed that St. Luke did not "make up" the speeches of St Peter in Acts. The speeches have an Aramaic undertone which proves that St. Luke based his writing on original written and oral traditions; he probably met many of the Christians who had been converted by Peter on that day. Moreover, in reading Peter's speeches in Acts we can hear the Apostles' sermons or, to use a Greek word, the "kerygma" or proclamation of the Good News about the LORD.

KERYGMA

- JESUS was the Messiah foretold by David and the Prophets;
- The Messianic Age or "last days" had begun with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit;
- JESUS had died, had risen, was now seated at the right hand of the Father;
- Repent, believe that JESUS is Messiah and LORD of all, be baptized in the Name of JESUS, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

MODEL OF CHURCH:

Powerful presence of the Spirit
organization:

Peter, Apostles, Elders, deacons; around Mary in prayer

ONE in MIND, ONE in HEART

EMPHASIS on KERYGMA, KOINONIA, DIAKONIA

The focus in ACTS 1-12 is on the
Apostle PETER, the undisputed Head
of the CHURCH

He does the preaching, he performs miracles, he takes important decisions.

“People brought the sick to him, so that even his shadow may touch them, and be healed”

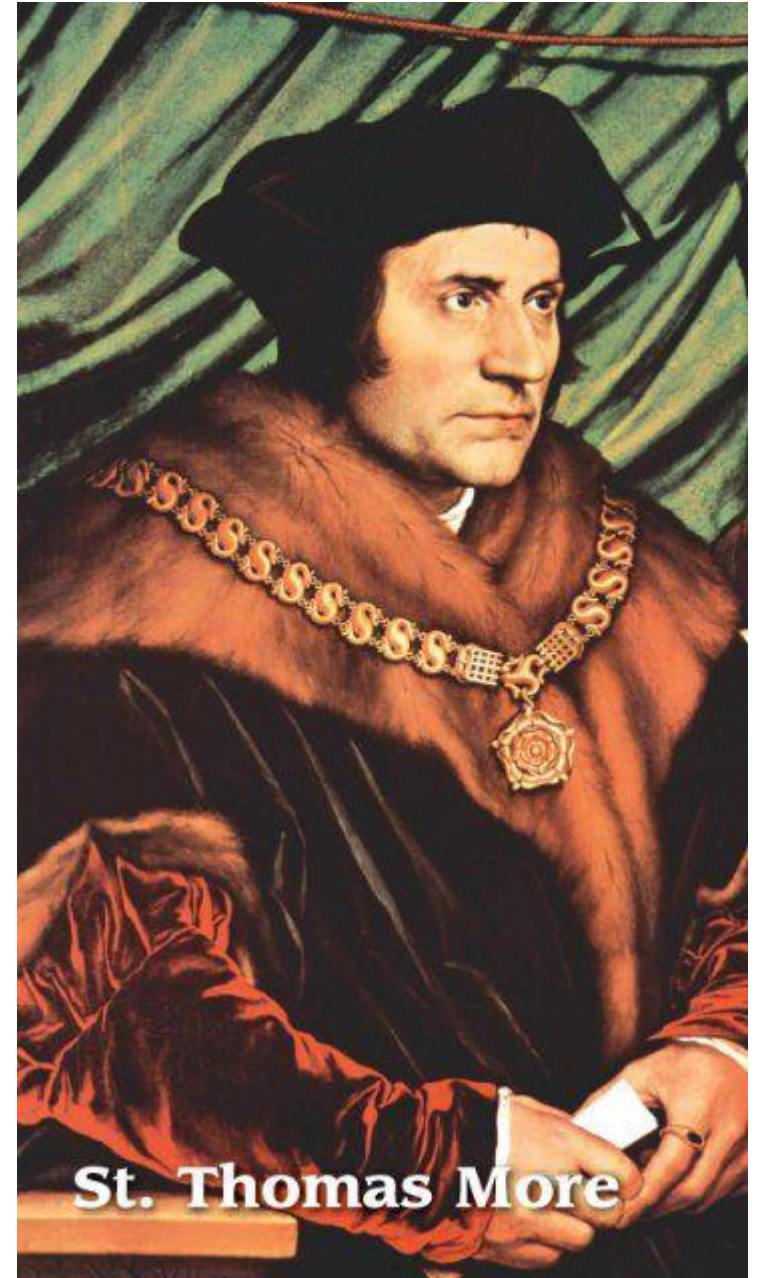
The primacy of Peter is acknowledged fully by St. LUKE, who was a disciple of PAUL.



Great work in Jerusalem and in Judea: Sanhedrin arrests the Apostles, have them flogged, want to put them to death, but

GAMALIEL intervenes:
“If it is of God it will prosper”;

Peter “WE must obey God rather than men”.



DEACONS

Instituted by the power of the APOSTLES, to be at the service of the Community, initially for the fair distribution of food.

The men chosen were outstanding for preaching as well.

The two most famous:

St STEPHEN

ST PHILIP

They were ordained by the imposition of the hands

Later there will be women “deaconesses”, mainly to assist women on the occasion of their baptism, and to visit widows. They wore special habit.



WITNESSES IN SAMARIA

The deacon PHILIP is highly successful in preaching to SAMARITANS, and many are converted.

The APOSTLES send Peter and John to see, and to CONFIRM.

The strange story of Simon the Magician who wants to buy the power to confer the SPIRIT. The origin of the sin of SIMONY.

The HOLY SPIRIT descends on all the Baptized in SAMARIA.

The Church reaches out to SAMARIA, as JESUS said.



SIMONY

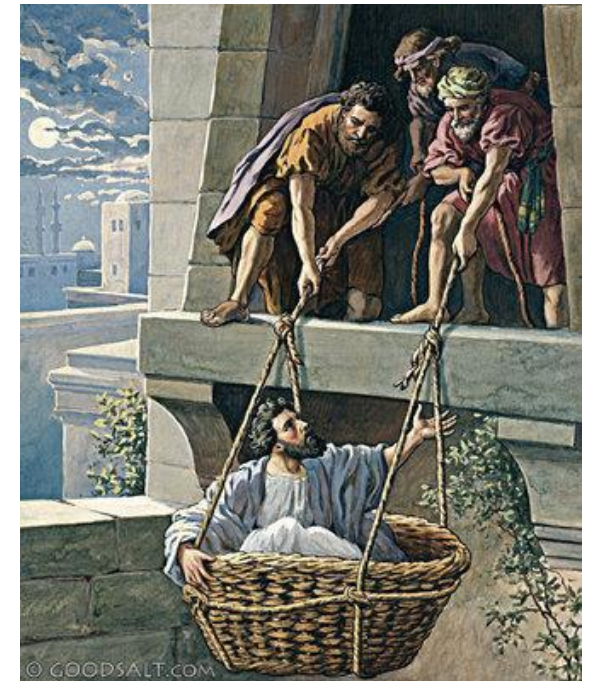
CONVERSION OF SAUL

The story is told **three times** in ACTS, to show its importance.

Saul is converted, goes into the desert for 3 years, returns to Damascus preaching JESUS, escapes from the city by being lowered in a basket. He then goes to Jerusalem to meet the columns of the Church: Peter, John, James and they approve of him.

He has to escape from Jerusalem and goes back to TARSUS.

The role of BARNABAS, who calls him to a fully ministry with him in ANTIOCH.



WITNESSES to THE END OF THE WORLD

CORNELIUS, the FIRST GENTILE to become CHRISTIAN.

Peter is ordered by God by means of a dream to turn to the GENTILES. The dream of all clean and unclean animals in the large net.

Cornelius is baptized by Peter.

The ministry of Peter: the healing of Aeneas, and the raising to life of TABITHA.

Complaints of Jewish Christians on Peter's acceptance of the Gentiles into the Church.



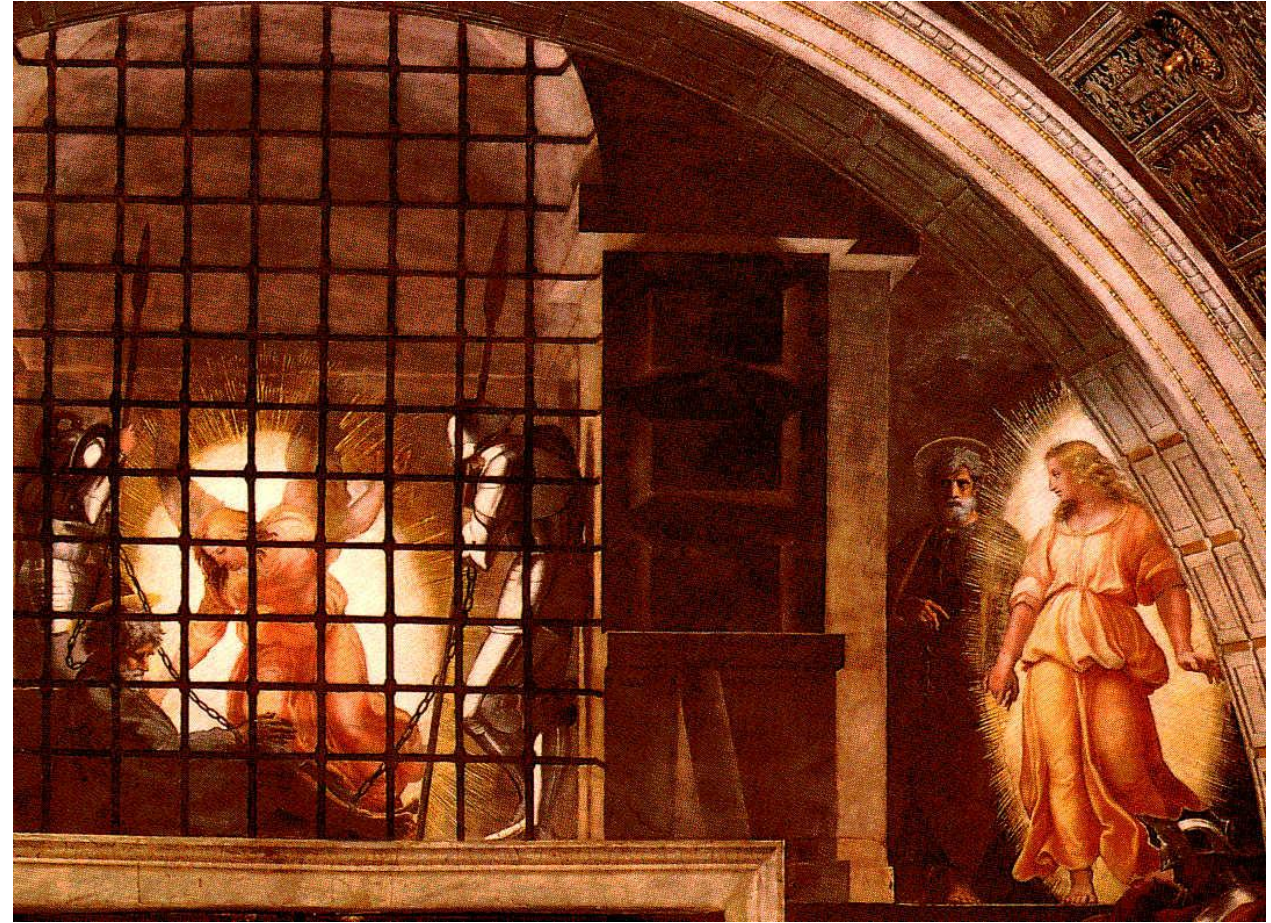
Peter is arrested and about to be put to death

James the Greater has already paid with his life

The Angel sets Peter free

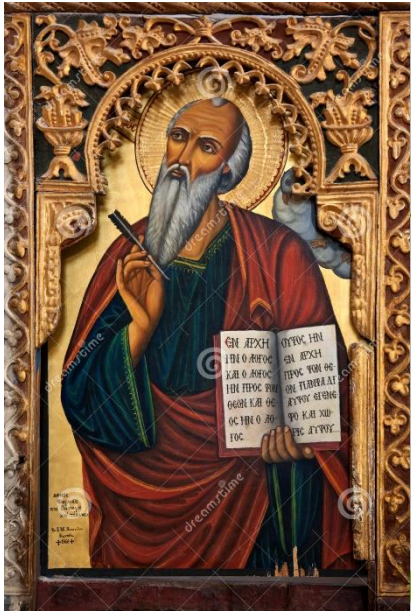
Peter and RHODA

From this point forward, ACTS deals almost exclusively with the ministry of St. Paul.

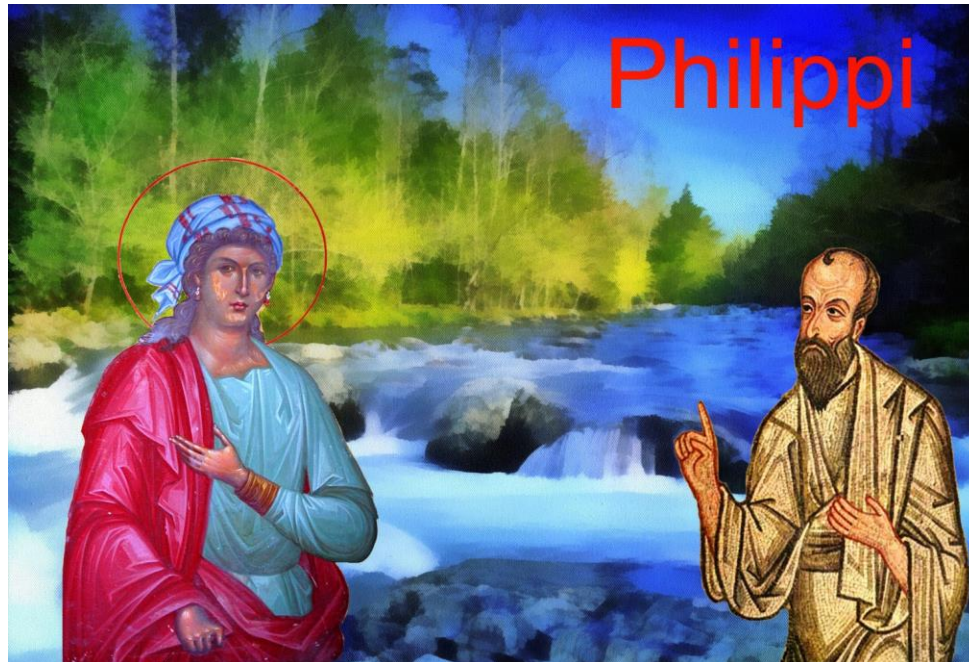


PAUL's MISSIONARY JOURNEYS





ROLE OF LAITY:
Aquila and Priscilla, Lydia;
Charism in the Church.
BARNABAS.

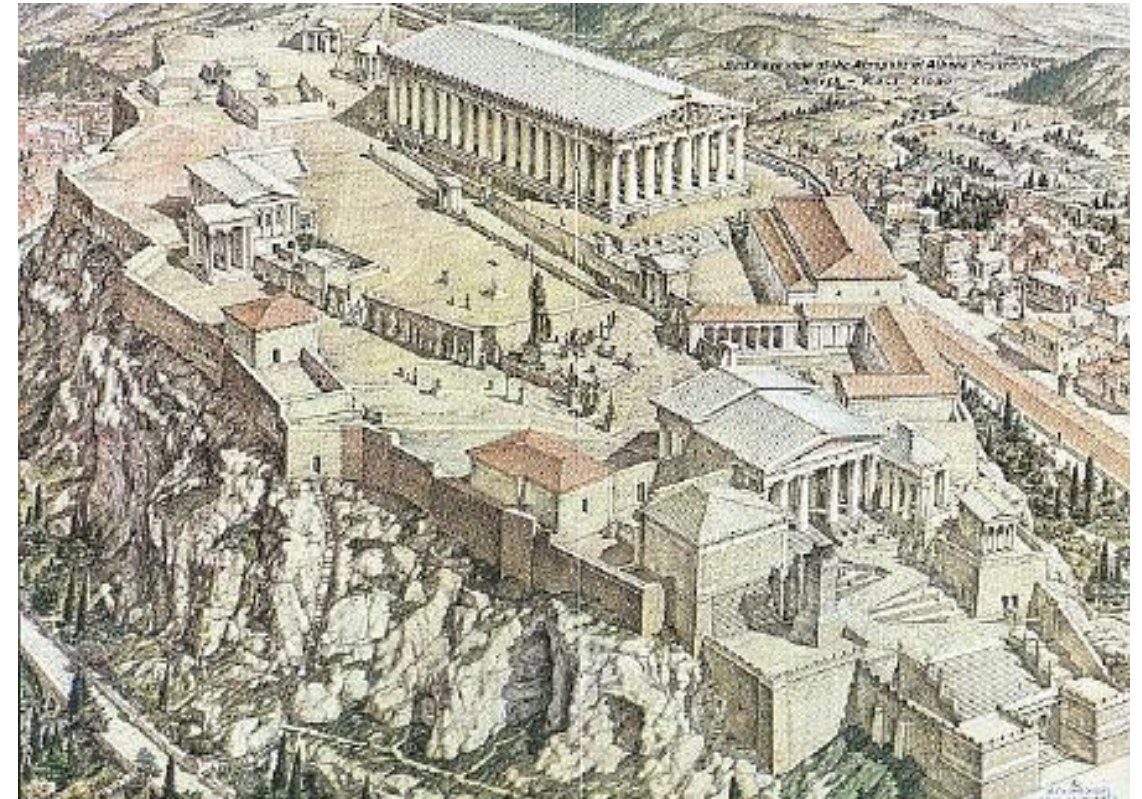




He moved on from Athens to CORINTH, a very corrupt city. He went there with much “fear and trembling” determined to preach only CHRIST and the mystery of the CROSS.

Paul was certain of a great success in ATHENS, the cultural capital of the Ancient World – He prepared himself very carefully and delivered a splendid sermon.

The result? Humiliation and laughter.



Paul, a
tent-
maker,
with
Aquila
and
Priscilla



Corinth
had two
harbours.
It was a
splendid
city.



*Great success at CORINTH. The LORD
Appeared to Paul and said: "Do not be afraid for I
am with you. Speak and do not stay silent. I have a
great people in the city".*

PAUL IN ROME

From Acts 21 to Acts 28 we have the account of Paul's arrest in Jerusalem, the plot to kill Paul, his transferral to the prison in Caesarea, Paul's appeal to be judged by Caesar in Rome, his journey to Rome as a prisoner, with Luke, and finally his staying at the prison in Rome, a sort of house arrest, for two years.

We do not know for sure what happened next. Was Paul released? Probably. If he was, it is likely that he went on to Spain, and to Asia Minor and Greece. Tradition tells us that he was arrested once more and was taken to Rome. This time, however, he was put to death by the Emperor Nero, in 67AD.

Paul brought to a first end JESUS' words: **"You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Samaria, and to the end of the world"**.

Have we lost the desire to take the Good News everywhere? The task ahead for every Christian is always clear: to bring JESUS to everyone in whatever way we can, starting with the witness of a beautiful Christian life, as individuals and as communities – like the early Christians.

