

## **A Summary of our May Liturgical Talk regarding the Acts of the Apostles**

The first readings during this month of May offer us a chance to read excerpts from Luke's Acts of the Apostles – which excerpts in turn offer us an incentive to read through the whole of that interesting, very dramatic book – if you haven't ever read through it.

Acts starts off with Pentecost, the festival on which Judaism commemorated Israel's reception of the Torah, the Law, its Constitution, delivered to Moses on Mt. Sinai centuries before. Luke tells us that on this particular Pentecost the Holy Spirit (as the very author of the Old Law) did itself descend upon and permeate the whole early Christian community to become a new and universal Israel – the Church. And this occurred at a time when the Jews - not just local Jews but Jews (and other pilgrims) from all the known world - were gathered in Jerusalem like a rising tide that would soon inundate the world with the good news of Christ. This event is followed by Peter's cure of a lame man outside the Temple gate, who leaps up and follows him, jumping and cheering – a living metaphor of how this new movement will revive the lame condition of Judaism and the world at large.

We then behold the once timid Peter now standing up before a Temple inquisition where Jesus once stood, talking back and somehow escaping their imprisonment – not only once but later still when even more securely chained. Something is breaking loose in the world. We see a Jew named Stephen (of a more cosmopolitan background, conversant with Greek and Roman culture) declaring what we might call a liberal change within Judaism – then stoned to death but only for the text to shift to a conservative fellow named Saul supporting his death – who himself is knocked to the ground by some overwhelming change of heart on the road to Damascus. We see the deacon Philip gathering followers in Samaria (off base to Jews) and even baptizing an Ethiopian courtier traveling to his homeland.

Horizons spreading, advancing. Peter, still conservative enough to adhere to the dietary laws of his past, is challenged to visit the extended family of a Gentile centurion – a voice telling him not to declare unclean anything that God has made – and he witnesses the Holy Spirit descending upon these foreigners as well. Soon Paul is sailing off to Cyprus and Asia Minor to preach at Jewish synagogues – with much success and much (sometimes violent) resistance. He then crosses over into Macedonia and Greece. Reaction by some Jerusalem Christians to restrain Peter and Paul are dealt with, Paul insisting on the catholicity (universality) of the Gospel's Spirit. He even dares bring a Gentile on one occasion into the Temple precincts – breaking a serious taboo. This leads to his arrest and journey, under guard, to Rome for an imperial judgment – while all the while he is contemplating a subsequent journey to Spain! --

And then there are the prison breaks! Such a great metaphor of what redemption means! The Spirit behind our Tradition is one of irrepressible reanimation - the unfolding of new insights, fresh being, a perpetual advance aimed at taking you ever closer to - home at last!

***Geoff Wood***