

ACTS 15: THE COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM (49/50)

Eternal Father,

In Your Divine Providence, You called men like St. Paul to fulfill Your promise to extend Your gift of salvation to all of mankind. It is a mission that began with the faithful remnant of the Jewish men and women who were Jesus' disciples and Apostles and continues in the Church today. Give us the spiritual strength and wisdom we need, Lord, to give our witness of Christ to our families, our friends and neighbors and to support the missionary efforts of the Church in reaching other peoples throughout the world. Inspire our faith communities to follow the example of the generous spirit of the Christians of the Church at Antioch who sent St. Paul and his companions across Asia Minor and Greece to establish churches that called hundreds of Gentiles to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. We pray in the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

IMPORTANT BACKGROUND TO THIS CHAPTER:

- God sends Cornelius to Peter (10:1-8)
- Peter's vision (10:9-16)
- Holy Spirit descends on the Gentiles, Peter baptizes them (10:44-48)
 - o "Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (10:47)
- Peter explains to the Church at Jerusalem 11:1-18
 - o "If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" (11:17)
 - o When they heard this they were silenced. And they glorified God saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life." (11:18)
- The Church in Antioch grows (first time called Christians)
 - o First by those scattered by the persecution (11:19) – to the Jews only
 - o Then by men of Cyprus and Cyrene (11:20) – to the Greeks as well.
 - o Then by Barnabas (11:22)
 - o Then also by Saul (11:25-26) stays for a year
- First missionary journey (13:1-14-28)
 - o Comes back to Antioch, declares all that God had done.

THE REASON FOR THE COUNCIL

- **"Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (15:1)**
 - o And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your descendants after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He that is eight days old among you

shall be circumcised; every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house, or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he that is born in your house and he that is bought with your money, shall be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.” (Gen 17:9-14)

- on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. (Lev 12:3)
- And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “This is the ordinance of the Passover: no foreigner shall eat of it; ⁴⁴ but every slave that is bought for money may eat of it after you have circumcised him. ⁴⁵ No sojourner or hired servant may eat of it. (Ex 12:43:45)

- The Debate

- “Some men” came down from Judea (15:1)
- Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them
- Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. (15:2)

- The Debate Continues

- They declared all that God had done with them (15:4)
- But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up... (15:5)
 - Pharisees cited 20 times in Gospel accd. To St. Luke
 - 1st time here, only twice in Acts (see Acts 23)
- “Much Debate” among the apostles and the elders (15:6-7)

- **Peter rose and said to them**

- Sound familiar?
 - “Peter stood up among the brethren” (1:15)
 - Apostolic Succession
 - “But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice” (2:14)
 - The definitive declaration of the precedence of the New Covenant
 - And the sacramental nature of entering into it
 - In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. (Col 2:11-12)
- Refers to his experience with Cornelius
 - Brethren, you know that in the early days God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. (15:7)
- But **we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.** (15:11)
- Peter speaks as the head and the spokesman of the apostolic Church. He formulates a doctrinal judgement about the means of salvation.

- It is through this council that salvation in Jesus Christ is properly understood.
 - Heresies, or conflicting viewpoints refines the faith... a pattern that will be seen in the other councils as well.
- **And all the assembly kept silence (15:12)**
- James speaks (15:13-21)
 - He concurs (asents) to the ruling of Peter. "Symeon has related..."
 - Symeon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of equal value to ours through the righteousness of our God and savior Jesus Christ: (2 Pet 1:1).
 - OT Proofs that the Gentiles are meant to have salvation
 - I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves." (Gen 12:3)
 - All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him (Ps22:27)
 - It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." (Is 49:6)
 - And many nations shall join themselves to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people; and I will dwell in the midst of you, and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.(Zech 2:11)
 - After this I will return, and **I will rebuild the dwelling of David**, which has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up, that the rest of men may seek the Lord, **and all the Gentiles** who are called by my name, says the Lord, who has made these things known from of old. (Jer 12:15; Amos 9:11-12; Is 45:21)
 - Kingdom Restoration
 - God swore an oath that his kingdom would last for all time
 - When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. (2 Sam 7:12-13)
 - Thou hast said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant: I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations. (Ps. 89:3-4)
 - The Kingdom extended into Gentile territory and the Word of God was made available to the Gentiles.
 - Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of thy people Israel, comes from a far country for thy name's sake (for they shall hear of thy great name, and thy mighty hand, and of thy outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this house, hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to thee; in order that all the peoples of the earth may know thy name and fear thee, as do thy

people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by thy name. (1 Kings 8:41-43)

- According to Amos, the Kingdom is to be restored.
 - In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; (Amos 9:11)
- Acts Proposes that the Church is the Restored Kingdom
 - And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; **and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David**, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.” (Lk 1:30-33)
 - To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the **kingdom of God**. (Acts 1:3) **Jesus**
 - So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore **the kingdom** to Israel?” (1:6)
 - Brethren, I may say to you confidently of the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption (2:29-31)
 - But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the **kingdom of God** and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. (8:12) **Philip**
 - And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king; of whom he testified and said, ‘I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.’ Of this man’s posterity God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised... And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he spoke in this way, ‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’... For David, after he had served the counsel of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid with his fathers, and saw corruption; ³⁷ but he whom God raised up saw no corruption.(13:22-23, 34, 36-37) **Paul**
 - exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the **kingdom of God**. (14:22) **Paul**
 - Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in

the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ; (Rom 1:1-6)

- The Letter of the Council to the Antiochians
 - o Let's look at how the council worked
 - Conflict
 - Council
 - Decision
 - Document distributed
 - o "For **it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit** and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things"(15:28)
 - When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:13-15).
- **And when they read it, they rejoiced at the exhortation.** (15:31)
 - o Why?

GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Why is this decision so important for our understanding of salvation and the Divine Economy?
2. What does this council teach us about how God speaks through His Church?