

20 April 2024 - Saturday of the 3rd week of Easter

[Acts, 9:31-42; John, 6:60-69](#)

Homily

In this Easter season, the Mass readings are very rich. During the first two weeks, they have presented to us above all the apparitions of Jesus, and yesterday we had, in a way, the last of these apparitions, the one to Paul.

Over the next few days, the readings from Acts will describe the first stages in the establishment and configuration of the early Church, first in Jerusalem, then throughout Judea, Samaria and Galilee, and finally in the Gentile nations.

Saint Luke is an excellent writer. Not only is he the only author in the New Testament with a good command of Greek, but above all he knows how to organise a narrative, introducing all the main characters from the outset. In the chapters of Acts that we are reading these days, he introduces us to the two pillars of the Church, Peter and Paul, showing very clearly their distinct missions, and the specific geographical area of each one's mission.

There is something very mysterious, and no doubt a double meaning, in the first verse of today's reading: "Then the Church enjoyed peace throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria." This mention of peace is all the more surprising, given that persecution is mentioned just before this and will be mentioned again shortly afterwards. But perhaps there is another meaning -- a little ironic -- to this statement.

We must not forget that the division of Scripture into verses and chapters is recent, and its division into sections with headings and subheadings is even more recent. In all the manuscripts of the Bible, the text of a book runs from beginning to end without any division into paragraphs or sections. Yesterday, we read the account of Paul's conversion (or rather his call); then Acts told us how Paul began to preach in Jerusalem and how his preaching aroused much opposition. The text then says: "When the believers heard of this, they brought him to Caesarea, and from there they sent him to Tarsus". Then the text continues, without any transition: "The Church then enjoyed peace in all Judea, Galilee and Samaria." The meaning is clear. Paul's presence and apostolic activity disturbed the peace of Jerusalem, and this peace -- a very superficial and precarious peace, to be honest -- was restored after Paul had been sent to Tarsus, from whence he had come... It is marvellous to see how God's plans are

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realised through human intervention, even through human fear and weakness.

We see how Luke composes his book of Acts (the second book of his Gospel) in a marvellous way. After describing the early life of the early Church in Jerusalem, he brings Paul there briefly, and then sends him back to Tarsus, leaving him out of the action for a while. We know that most of Acts will be devoted to Paul's activity. But for the moment Luke wants to concentrate on Peter and show how he is clearly established as Jesus' successor; today we would say Jesus' vicar, performing the same miracles as Jesus. However, we must be careful about the type of miracles Peter performs. They are never the exercise of some kind of magical power in order to prove something. They are simply acts of mercy or pity. Peter, for example, sees a paralysed man who has been confined to his bed for eight years and simply says to him: "Jesus Christ heals you; get up and walk". Peter does not feel that he is performing a miracle himself. He simply said and did what Jesus would have said and done. Then he was told about Tabita, who had died and was being mourned by everyone. Well, he simply says to her: "Tabita kum -- Get up, Tabita", which she does. Peter is a man of few words!

Paul, on the other hand, will not perform that kind of miracle and will be a man of many words -- and what words!

It is truly wonderful to see how God, who seems to have enjoyed creating a great variety of human beings all different from each other, also takes pleasure in establishing his Church on people who are as different from each other as possible.

If we look at each other, in any community, we easily become aware that we are very different from each other. Let's learn to see these differences not as barriers between us, but as effects of God's love, which takes pleasure in this diversity.

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