

The Church of the Holy Apostles;
A Bible Study on the Book of Acts
Based upon the Homilies of St John Chrysostom (SJC)
Study Guide – May 4, 2016, Acts 25.23-26.29 - Homily 52

Prayer before reading of the Holy Scriptures: Shine within our hearts, loving Master, the pure light of Your divine knowledge, and open the eyes of our minds that we may comprehend the message of Your Gospel. Instill in us also reverence for Your blessed commandments so that, having conquered sinful desires, we may pursue a spiritual life, thinking and doing all those things which are pleasing to You. For You, Christ our God, are the light of our souls and bodies, and to You we give glory, together with Your Father who is without beginning and Your all holy, good and life giving Spirit, always now and forever and to the ages of ages.

Chapter 25 v. 23-27 *So the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus' command Paul was brought in. And Festus said: "King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole assembly of the Jews petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying out that he was not fit to live any longer. "But when I found that he had committed nothing deserving of death, and that he himself had appealed to Augustus, I decided to send him. "I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him. Therefore I have brought him out before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write. "For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him."*

Paul is paraded in with great pomp and circumstance like a conqueror.

Festus accused the Jews while he acquits Paul – SJC “*After all these repeated examinations, the governor finds not how he may condemn him.*” Over and over Paul is proven innocent.

The Jews provide for their own evil reputation by chasing Paul around the region – SJC “*See how they become the unwilling heralds both of their own wickedness and of Paul's virtue, even to the emperor himself: so that Paul was carried away (to Rome) with more renown than if he had gone there without bonds: for not as an impostor and a deceiver, after so many judges had acquitted him, was he now carried there. Quit therefore of all charges, among those with whom he was bred and born, and not only so, (but) thus free from all suspicion, he makes his appearance at Rome.*”

Because of Paul’s spotless record, Festus has nothing to tell Caesar.

Chapter 26 v. 1-3 *Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself: "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, "especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently.*

Paul’s conscience is clear – SJC “*This is a mark of a clear conscience, not to shrink from a judge who has accurate knowledge of the circumstances, but even to rejoice, and to call himself happy.*”

Paul is fully prepared to offer his defense.

Chapter 26 v. 4-23 *"My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. "They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. "And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. "To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews. "Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead? "Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. "This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. "And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities. " While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, "at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. "And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' "So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 'But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. 'I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, 'to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'" Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, "but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles,*

that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. "For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. "Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come -- "that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles."

Paul's defense is based upon his love for the faith in the past.

Paul delay's offering his defense until the whole crowd is present.

Paul shifts the attention away from himself toward the Resurrection.

Two truths of the Resurrection are offered as proof: a)The Prophets said it, b)Christ actually told Paul – SJC

"That he may not seem to be broaching some novelty, although he had great things to say, yet he again takes refuge with the prophets."

If the crowd was not thinking the Resurrection wasn't real, Paul would have had no reason to preach it. Even Paul originally doubted it to the point of persecuting Christians.

Paul calmly lays out his defense and history without flattery, ascribing everything to God, without hesitation.

Satan=Darkness God=Light

Paul switches from defendant to teacher

Chapter 26 v. 24-29 *Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!" But he said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. "For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner. "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe." Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian." And Paul said, "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains."*

Festus interrupts out of frustration, but Paul gently continues speaking "through" Festus to the King.

The doctrine of the Cross and Resurrection spreads to the entire world.

SJC *"He shows that the King knows all perfectly; at the same time, all but saying to the Jews, 'And you indeed ought to have known these things,' for this is the meaning of that which he adds, 'For this was not done in a corner.'"*

Paul considers his chains as glory, but since the crowd thinks the chains are shame, he doesn't want the chain for them.

Teaching on "Earthly shame VS Glory" – (see Homily 52)

1. People who seek worldly things only see beauty based upon lust

For if those who cherish the foul (earthly passion which men call) love, think nothing either glorious or precious, but those things alone which tend to gratify their lust, they think both glorious and honorable, and their mistress is everything to them; much more do those, who have been taken captive by this heavenly love, think nothing of the cost.

2. The Passions avoid the fire of faith

He is as far from being taken captive by any passion, as the gold refined in the fire and purified is free from alloy. For even as flies would not dart into the midst of a flame, but fly from it, so the passions dare not even to come near this man.

3. Setting your eyes inward raises your view toward Heaven

For when having turned our mind inwards we think of any of the unseen things, our views become raised above the things on earth. Let us despise glory: let us be willing to be laughed at rather than to be praised. For he indeed who is laughed at is nothing hurt: but he who is praised is much hurt.

4. There is no glory in having men fear you

For of those things which are only able to terrify what do we not turn away from? Is it not so with wild beasts, with sounds, with sights, with places, with the air, such as darkness? Let us not therefore think it a great thing, if men fear us. For, in the first place, no man indeed is frightened at us: and, secondly, it is no great thing (if they were). Virtue is a great good.

5. The tools of healing can kill if used in ignorance

He that possesses them not, neither saves nor destroys: but he that possesses them, destroys, if he knows not how to use them: since the healing power is not only in the nature of the medicines, but also in the art of the person applying them: where this is not, all is marred. Such also is the ruler: he has for instruments, his voice, anger, executioners, banishments, honors, gifts, and praises; he has also for medicines, the law; has

also for his patients, men; for a place to practice in, the court of justice; for pupils, he has the soldiers: if then he know not the science of healing, all these profit him nothing.

6. Control your soul before you attempt to control others

He therefore that is to superintend a family, and order it well, must first bring his own soul into order; for it is his family: but if he cannot order his own family, where there is but one soul, where he himself is master, where he is always along with himself, how shall he order others? He that is able to regulate his own soul, and makes the one part to rule, the other to be subject, this man will be able to regulate a family also: but he that can do this by a family, can do it by a city also: and if by a city, then also by the world. But if he cannot do this for his own soul, how then shall he be able to do it for the world?

Life Application Challenge – (Homily 52) Scorn the pomp of life

For luxury or delightful living seems indeed to be, the enjoying pleasure and the gratifying the belly: yet it is not this thing, but the contrary: it is, to have a soul worthy of admiration, and to be in a state of pleasure. For let there be a man eating, drinking, and wantoning; then let him suffer cares and loss of spirits: can this man be said to be in a state of delight?... Who then will have the most sorrows— he that cares for none of these things, or he that cares for them? He that fears changes, or he that does not fear? He that is in dread of jealousy, of envy, of false accusations, of plottings, of destruction, or he that stands aloof from these fears? He that wants many things, or he that wants nothing? He that is a slave to masters without number, or he that is a slave to none? He that has need of many things, or he that is free? He that has one lord to fear, or he that fears despots innumerable? Well then, greater is the pleasure here. This then let us pursue, and not be excited about the things present: but let us laugh to scorn all the pomp of life, and everywhere practise moderation, that we may be enabled so to pass through this life, that it may be without pain, and to attain unto the good things promised, through the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom to the Father and the Holy Ghost together be glory, might, honor, now and ever, world without end. Amen.