

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 25, 2016, Acts 28.1-16 - Homily 54

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 28 v. 1-10 *Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta. And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold. But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand. So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live." But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god. In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days. And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed. They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary.*

Entire winter spent on the island rather than in the city

Native = non-Greek speaking people. GR: Βάρβαροι = barbarians is a political term for ANYONE who was not part of the Greek-speaking (Hellenistic world)

Paul works for his warmth and food rather than “always” performing miracles which he reserved for emergencies

Paul publicly bit by viper for belief. Even the natives would not condemn him without “cause” SJC *“Well also was this permitted, that they should both see the thing and utter the thought, in order than, when the result ensued, there might be no disbelieving the miracle.”* Just like in Acts 14.11 they think Paul is a god.

Jews are persecuting while the natives are kind.

Natives understood “gods” were everywhere

Publius was compassionate to them even though he didn’t witness anything. In return Paul heals. SJC *“See how all this is done for the sake of Paul, to the end that the prisoners should believe, and the soldiers, and the centurion...See, when the judgment is right, and not preoccupied by some passion, how immediately it gets right judging and gives sound verdicts.*

SJC *“It is plain that having thus received them, they also received the word of the preaching: for it is not to be supposed, that during an entire three months they would have had all this kindness shown them, had these persons not believed strongly, and herein exhibited the fruits (of their conversion): so that from this we may see a strong proof of the great number there was of those that believed.”*

Chapter 28 v. 11-16 *After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island. And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days. From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli, where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. And so we went toward Rome. And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage. Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.*

The Gospel message has reached as far as Sicily. This gave Paul great comfort and encouragement

After all the various proofs of his innocence, he is not treated as guilty. He is guarded for his protection not because he might escape. SJC *“They would not else have been to accuse him. Nevertheless, it was not for this that he was cared; it was for the teaching that he was concerned.”*

Teaching on “Trials bring Strength” – (see Homily 54)

1. Struggle works to our advantage

For this is a marvelous thing, that not by the things which seem to be for our security, but by their very opposites, all comes to be for us. And that you may learn this— Pharaoh commanded the infants to be cast

into the river. (Exodus 1:22 Unless the infants had been cast forth, Moses would not have been saved, he would not have been brought up in the palace. When he was safe, he was not in honor; when he was exposed, then he was in honor.

2. It isn't about living to an old age, but living properly

For say, what do they gain, who die more slowly? Nothing: for the having good days does not depend on the living many years or few years, but in the using life properly.

3. Punishment is worse when we hurt ourselves

Adam was the worse for it, it was he that injured himself: for it is the wrongs that are done to us by others that become the means of great good to us, not so the wrongs which are done by ourselves. As indeed, because the fact is that when hurt by others, we grieve, but not so when hurt by ourselves, therefore it is that God shows, that he who suffers unjustly at the hands of another, gets renown, but he who injures himself, receives hurt: that so we may bear the former courageously, but not the latter.... but he is the less punished, when he has sinned through the devil's working with him; for the punishments are not the same for all sins. Let us not deceive ourselves: the devil is not the cause of our taking harm, if we be watchful: rather what he does, is to awake us out of our sleep; what he does, is to keep us on the alert.

4. We give the devil permission to enter

For say, why did the devil prevail in Judas' case? When Satan entered into him (John 13:27), you will say. Yes, but hear the cause: it was because he was a thief, and bare what was put in the bag. (John 12:) It was he that himself gave the devil a wide room for entering into him: so that it is not the devil who puts into us the beginning, it is we that receive and invite him.

5. Cares and anxieties are an exercise for our soul

But as it is, cares and anxieties are an exercise and discipline of philosophy, a method for the best of training. For say, let a man be brought up in a palace, having no pain, nor care, nor anxiety, and having neither cause for anger nor failure, but whatever he sets his mind upon, that let him do, in that let him succeed, and have all men obeying him: (see whether) such a man would not become more irrational than any wild beast. But as it is, our reverses and our afflictions are as it were a whetstone to sharpen us. For this reason the poor are for the most part wiser than the rich, as being driven about and tost by many waves. Thus a body also, being idle and without motion, is sickly and unsightly: but that which is exercised, and suffers labor and hardships, is more comely and healthy: and this we should find to hold also in the case of the soul. Iron also, lying unused, is spoilt, but if worked it shines brightly; and in like manner a soul which is kept in motion.

Life Application Challenge – (Homily 54) Be Thankful for your struggles

It is a good thing, even pain in moderation; a good thing, care; a good thing, want; for they make us strong: good also are their opposites: but each of these when in excess destroys us; and the one relaxes, but the other (by overmuch tension) breaks us. Do you see not, that Christ also thus trains His own disciples? If they needed these things, much more do we. But if we need them, let us not grieve, but even rejoice in our afflictions. For these are remedies, answering to our wounds, some of them bitter, others mild; but either of them by itself would be useless. Let us therefore return thanks to God for all these things: for He does not suffer them to happen at random, but for the benefit of our souls. Therefore, showing forth our gratitude, let us return Him thanks, let us glorify Him, let us bear up courageously, considering that it is but for a time, and stretching forward our minds to the things future, that we may both lightly bear the things present, and be counted worthy to attain unto the good things to come.