

Acts 3 & 4 Exegetical Meditation



The apostles got to work immediately after Pentecost. Under their leadership, the Church grew like wildfire. In large part to events such as the one described in Acts 3. Acts 3 and 4 make up one single narrative, so I will treat them together.

Acts 3 & 4 Breakdown:

Peter and John Heal Lame Man- 3:1-11

Peter's Discourse to the Witnesses of the Miracle- 3:12-26

The Sanhedrin Discussions- 4:1-7

Sanhedrin's Questioning and Peter's Response- 4:8-20

Apostles Released and Prayers of Thanksgiving- 4:21-31

Life of the Church Described Again- 4:32-37

Peter and John are closely linked within the gospels of Luke and John (see Lk 8:14, Lk 22:8, Jn 18:15, Jn 20:2, Jn 21:20-23), the pair symbolize the administrative and mystical dimensions of the gospel. Peter is of course the first pope and leader as made evident through his constant discourses in the midst of the apostles throughout the book. John is the beloved disciple who was such a close companion to Jesus that he was chosen to take care of Jesus's mother until her Assumption into Heaven. Corresponding to the figures of Peter and John themselves, the healing of the lame man simultaneously shows the authority of the Church and its mystical power. "Peter and John fastening his eyes upon him, said; "Look upon us" (Acts 3:4). It is as if Peter and John exercised their mystical authority and said "look, what is about to happen to you is a result of Jesus's

relationship to us.” The man is healed in the name of Jesus, by His grace. However, it is important to understand the ecclesial dimension of the miracle. Jesus indeed is the healer, but He heals through His Church, of which Peter is the earthly head and John is its earthly heart. The lame man asked for alms, but he got so much more. Peter and John *give* him Jesus (Acts 3:6).

If you notice, the amazement of those in the temple is not upon the miracle itself. The onlookers did not see the miracle that took place at the entrance of the temple (see Acts 3:8), they are amazed by the results of the miracle (see Acts 3:9). St John Chrysostom states of the scene “How then, I pray you, was it believed? The man himself who was healed proclaimed the benefit.” As all wonder leads to the desire for understanding, the Jews surrounded Peter and John seeking answers. Peter seizes the opportunity as any good leader would. Peter’s speech accomplishes three goals. One, that Jesus Christ was the principal cause of the miracle, while Peter and John were the instruments and the faith of the lame man was the necessary condition for the cure (Acts 3:12, 16). Two, that Jesus whom they crucified has risen and proven his divinity and fulfillment of the law and the prophets (Acts 3:13-22) Three, that they must repent and convert from wickedness to Jesus Christ (Acts 3:23-26).

Five thousand people believed in Jesus on account of this miracle (see Acts 4:4). This was not acceptable for the Sadducees and the Pharisees. They had thought they had put an end to this troublemaker and His followers. Annas and Caiaphas capture Peter and John and question them. First it was their Lord that was questioned by the Sanhedrin for His disturbances in the public sphere, now it is His closest disciples. Quite fitting given our Lord’s remarks “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me” (Mt 16:24).

Interestingly, of all questions they can ask, the Sanhedrin asks, “By what power, or by what name, have you done this?” (Acts 4:7). This suggests that the Sanhedrin actually believes the miracle took place. Peter answers boldly “that it was in the name of Christ the Nazarene whom you crucified; whom God raised from the dead; in His name this man stands before you healed” (Acts

4:10). Peter proceeds to address how eternal salvation comes through Jesus alone. The Sanhedrin were amazed and were literally rendered speechless (see Acts 4:14). They warned them never to speak in Jesus's name again, and let them go. Of course, Peter and John will not oblige. How is it correct for Peter and John to be disobedient to the civil authorities? Well, simply because when the authority of God and man are at odds, it is clear that God's authority is to prevail. Peter and John literally have God living inside their souls. They literally could not deny speaking of Jesus because of the abundance of charity overflowing out of them.

Peter and John return to their fellow Christians. They all pray to God "with one accord" upon hearing their happenings (Acts 4:24). They offer prayers of thanksgiving and implore God to pour out more to speak "with all boldness" (Acts 4:30). There is that boldness again. Boldness is exactly what Peter and the rest of the apostles did not have while they followed Jesus during His three-year ministry (aside from St John arguably, since he stayed with Jesus during His crucifixion). What is the difference now? This now found boldness is because they now have the Advocate, the Holy Spirit living inside them and empowering them to follow their Lord. They pray as one bold voice. Their boldness literally "shook" the place that they gathered (Acts 4:31).

Similar to Acts 2:42-47 that described the Church's communal life after Pentecost, Acts 4:32-37 again touches on some aspects of how these Christians live and worship. These verses show the great unity of thought and mission shared amongst the disciples as Christ prayed for during the Last Supper (see John 17:2). They lived as one community. They all took care of one another. The rich took care of the poor and the poor took care of the rich. The chapter closes with an account of St Barnabas, the eventual courageous companion of St Paul on some of his apostolic missions, sold a piece of property in order to generously donate all of that money for the apostolic Church. This is written as an example of just one Christian's generosity. Doubtless, there were thousands of other Christians making similar sacrificial donations for the sake of evangelizing Jesus Christ the King to all of the nations!