

# Introduction to the Acts of the Apostles

Good evening, everyone, and welcome to our study of the Acts of the Apostles.

The Acts of the Apostles is the fifth book of the New Testament and serves as the bridge between the Gospels and the letters of Saint Paul and the other Apostles. Without Acts, we would know very little about how the Church grew from a small group of frightened disciples into the missionary Church that carried Christ's saving mercy to the ends of the earth (cf. Acts 1:8).

**"The Gospel of Luke** tells us what Jesus began to do and teach during His earthly ministry. **The Acts of the Apostles** tells us what Jesus continues to do through the Holy Spirit working in His Church. In a very real sense, the Acts of the Apostles has never ended. The mission of the Church continues today, and each one of us is called to write the next page through our own witness to Christ."

## The Author

From the earliest days of Christianity, the Church has attributed Acts to Saint Luke, the beloved physician and companion of Saint Paul. Luke also wrote the Gospel that bears his name. In fact, Acts is really the second volume of Luke's work. The Gospel tells us what Jesus "began to do and teach," while Acts shows us how Jesus continues His work through the Holy Spirit and His Church.

Luke addresses both books to a man named Theophilus, whose name means "lover of God." Whether Theophilus was a specific person or represents all believers, the message is clear: these events are meant for everyone who desires to know and follow God.

Saint Luke, a beloved physician as described by Saint Paul in Colossians 4:14, accompanied the Apostle on portions of his missionary journeys, giving him firsthand knowledge of the growth and struggles of the early Church.

Side note: While Scripture does not explicitly tell us that Saint Luke interviewed the Blessed Mother, ancient Christian tradition suggests that both were associated with Ephesus. This raises the beautiful possibility that Luke may have learned directly from Mary, helping to explain the uniquely detailed accounts of the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, and the hidden life of Jesus found only in his Gospel.

## The Historical Setting

Most scholars believe Acts was written around A.D. 62 to 70. The events begin with the Ascension of Jesus and continue for about thirty years, ending with Saint Paul preaching the Gospel in Rome.

During this period, the Roman Empire controlled much of the known world. Good roads, a common language—Greek—and the persecution that scattered the believers all served God's plan for rapidly spreading the Gospel.

## **The Purpose of the Book**

Acts was written to show that Christianity was not a new human invention but the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation. It demonstrates that the same Holy Spirit who empowered Jesus now empowers His Church.

The book also explains how the Gospel moved outward in ever-widening circles:

- From Jerusalem,
- To Judea and Samaria,
- And finally, to the ends of the earth.

This follows Jesus' own commission in Acts 1:8: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Many consider this verse to be the outline for the entire book.

## **Major Themes**

As we study Acts, we will see several important themes:

- **The Holy Spirit:** The Holy Spirit is the principal actor in the book. At Pentecost, the Spirit transforms fearful disciples into courageous witnesses.
- **The Birth of the Church:** Acts records the first Christian community, its worship, fellowship, and devotion to the teaching of the Apostles and to the breaking of bread.
- **The Power of Prayer:** Major decisions and miracles are surrounded by prayer. The early Christians relied on God before acting.
- **The Mission to All Nations:** The Gospel is not limited to one people or one culture. God opens the doors to Jews and Gentiles alike.
- **Perseverance Through Suffering:** The Apostles face persecution, imprisonment, and even martyrdom, yet the Word of God continues to spread.

## **A Catholic Perspective**

For Catholics, Acts is especially important because it shows the foundations of many aspects of Church life:

- Apostolic authority and succession.
- The leadership of Saint Peter.
- The role of bishops, deacons, and the laying on of hands.
- The importance of communal prayer and worship.

- The celebration of the Eucharistic community.
- The guidance of the Church by the Holy Spirit.

Acts reminds us that the Church was never intended to be merely a collection of individual believers but a living family united in faith and mission.

## **Why Acts Matters Today**

The Acts of the Apostles is not simply a history book. In many ways, it is an unfinished story. The same Holy Spirit who guided the Apostles continues to guide the Church today.

Some have said that we are living in "the twenty-ninth chapter of Acts," because the work of evangelization continues through each of us.

As we read Acts, we should ask ourselves:

- How is the Holy Spirit working in my life?
- Am I a witness to Christ in my family and community?
- How can I help continue the mission that began at Pentecost?

As we journey through Acts, we will not simply study the history of the early Church. We will encounter the same Holy Spirit who transformed ordinary fishermen into saints, who converted Saul the persecutor into Paul the Apostle, and who continues to call each of us to holiness and evangelization. Let us ask for the grace to hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church and to our own hearts.

## **Mary And The Early Church**

The Book of Acts reveals the Church under Mary's maternal care. The Blessed Virgin is present with the Apostles in the Upper Room, persevering with them in prayer before Pentecost (Acts 1:14). Her quiet but significant presence reminds us that the Church is born in an atmosphere of prayer, unity, and trust in God's promises.

## **Starting The Scripture Study**

As we begin this study, let us pray for the same courage, faith, and openness to the Holy Spirit that filled the first Christians, so that we too may become faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ.

Let us read **Acts 1:1-11**, which beautifully sets the stage for the entire book by recounting the Ascension and Christ's commission to His disciples. This passage naturally leads to the promise and coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.