

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, May 18th 2013

These readings—from the end of the Acts of the Apostles and from the end of the Gospel of John—were chosen for this Saturday before Pentecost because they wrap up the series of readings from Acts and John that we have been following during the weekdays all these seven weeks of the Easter season. Because that last page of Acts often gets overlooked, let's make that our focus.

Luke has been telling the story of Paul's final trip, the storm-tossed voyage to Rome, with a fruitful stop on the Island of Malta. He devotes the last 14 verses to Paul's evangelization of his fellow Jews while under house arrest in Rome for two years. By the time of the writing and publication of the book of Acts, both Luke and his readers surely knew that Paul died a martyr's death in Rome. So why didn't he include that part? After all, he was at pains to highlight other ways that Paul's ministry paralleled that of Jesus—e.g. the healings and the trials before Jewish and Roman officials. That is such an obvious question, we can be sure Luke expected us readers to ask it . . . and to come up with some kind of answer. Here is mine.

Ending this story of the early Christian movement just here, when Paul, still physically constrained by the conditions of house arrest, continues to proclaim the kingdom of God and teach about the Lord Jesus Christ—and with his final words, “Let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen,” still ringing—makes this the perfect place for Luke's (mainly Gentile) readers—including us!—to plug in.

It provokes the observation, “Hey, the story doesn't end here.” And that leads quickly to the realization, “Right! The story continues—and includes us!” This whole two-volume work—the Third Gospel and the Acts—which Luke calls “a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us” (Luke 1:1) is indeed just as much about us as it is about Jesus and the early Church, for we belong to that same faith community that claims Jesus as our risen Lord and find ourselves animated by the same Spirit to continue Jesus' mission of preaching and healing.

How encouraging to hear Luke describe Paul, under house arrest, still enabled to carry out that mission “with complete assurance and without hindrance” (Acts 28:31)! Let none of us claim that our situation doesn't allow us share our faith with a similar zeal.

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