

Cut to the Heart

WHAT WE FOUND

- The first Christian sermon is above all a proclamation of events, read through Scripture and argued as a case. No command about how to respond arrives before verse 38.
- Verse 23 holds two things together without resolving them: God's definite plan, and real human guilt. The Catechism holds the same two, and then turns the charge toward Christians, because our sins are involved.
- Peter argued rather than asserted. He argued from David's prophetic office, a text his hearers revered, a tomb publicly known among them, and the apostles' own eyewitness testimony.
- Roughly a third of the sermon is Old Testament quotation, and every quotation is load bearing. Paul at Athens quoted no Old Testament passage, though he did quote Greek poets. Same Gospel, two toolkits, chosen by audience.
- They were cut to the heart, and then they asked, "Brethren, what shall we do?" The demand came out of the crowd before it came out of the Apostle. That is now the third time in this study we have seen that order.
- Peter's answer was concrete and sacramental: repent, be baptized every one of you, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then he kept urging them.
- The Church proposes and imposes nothing. Both halves are binding: no pressure, and an actual proposal.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. John Paul II on proposing without imposing

St. John Paul II wrote that the Church proposes and imposes nothing, that she respects persons and cultures, and that she honors the sanctuary of conscience.

Read the sentence in both directions before you use it. It forbids coercion, manipulation, and improper inducement, while leaving respectful persuasion entirely intact. It also assumes that a proposal is actually made. Refusing to propose anything is not reverence for another person's conscience; it leaves the conscience with nothing to work on.

St. John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio 39 (1990).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Cyril of Jerusalem on what happens in the water

Instructing candidates preparing for Baptism, St. Cyril of Jerusalem teaches in substance that what takes place in the font is not a symbol standing in for something absent, but a real death and a real birth, and that the water and the Spirit belong together and are not to be separated.

This is why Peter's answer in verse 38 is not a formality tacked onto a conversion that had already happened. The answer to "what shall we do" is a sacrament.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, summarized from his catechetical instructions to those preparing for Baptism. A faithful summary of his teaching, not a quotation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope Francis on the content of the first announcement

Pope Francis wrote that the Church has rediscovered the central place of the first announcement, and gave its content in a single line: Jesus Christ loves you, he gave his life to save you, and he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen,

and free you.

He adds that this announcement is not one stage among others that we graduate from. It is the first in a qualitative sense, and it has to be heard again and again through every stage of catechesis. Nobody has outgrown it, however long they have been at this.

Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium 164 (2013).

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

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Rung 7 of the ladder. The hinge of the whole ladder. Six weeks of listening, and now you say one sentence out loud to another human being.

- Keep praying for the three by name, daily.
- Say your "one thing I know" sentence out loud to one of the three, this week. One sentence. Not the Gospel, not an argument, not an invitation yet.
- Do not build up to it and do not explain it afterward. Say it, and then let the silence be theirs.
- If they ask a question, answer honestly, including "I do not know" where that is the honest answer.
- If the moment does not come, do not manufacture one. Bring that back next week; it is a real report and there are six sessions left.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do?"

Acts 2:37

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read Acts 9:1-22 before we meet. Read it twice. The second time, read it paying attention only to Ananias.

CATECHISM REFERENCES

- **CCC 731.** At Pentecost, Christ's Passover is fulfilled in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- **CCC 1226.** From the day of Pentecost the Church has celebrated and administered Baptism.
- **CCC 1427.** The call to conversion is an essential part of the proclamation of the kingdom.
- **CCC 597.** No collective guilt for the death of Jesus may be laid on the Jewish people, in that generation or any other.
- **CCC 598.** The Church imputes to Christians the heaviest responsibility for the sufferings of Christ, because our sins are involved.
- **CCC 599-600.** The death of Jesus belongs to God's plan, and that plan includes each person's free response to grace.