

Peter Decides

Acts 10:1-48; 11:1-18; 15:1-29

WHAT WE FOUND

The Gentile door, the biggest in salvation history, opened through Peter: a sheet from heaven three times (he argued every round), the ruling at Cornelius's house, "God shows no partiality" (Acts 10:34), the Spirit falling mid-homily, and Peter's command to baptize. He summarized it himself later: "God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe" (15:7). And when criticized back in Jerusalem, he did not pull rank; he explained, and the church glorified God (11:18). Primacy in Acts is accountable service.

Then the first council, and the pattern we found in Deuteronomy 17 executing: the hard case went *up* to the apostles and elders. Much debate; Peter rose and stated the heart of the matter, including the sentence Catholics should quote first: "we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will" (15:11); and "all the assembly kept silence" (15:12). James, the local bishop, took Peter's testimony as his starting point ("Symeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles," 15:14) and proposed the pastoral application; the letter issued from the whole college with history's boldest warrant: "it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (15:28). Not James over Peter, not Peter alone; the Church has long read this scene as a pattern: doctrine voiced by the steward, application shaped by the local bishop, decision issued by the whole college, signature by the Spirit.

The binding lifted burdens rather than adding them, so that consciences across three provinces could rest on one answer. That is what the office is *for*. Next week the study faces the question the New Testament refuses to hide: what happens when the man who holds all this fails, publicly, again?

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles, on the Council*

Chrysostom marvels at the order of the assembly: there is no arrogance in the Church. Peter, entrusted with the flock, speaks first among them and with power; Paul and Barnabas are heard without interruption; and James, as bishop of Jerusalem, fittingly speaks last to apply what has been declared. For Chrysostom the council's beauty is that authority and brotherhood breathe together, each voice in its place.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Jerome *Letter 15, to Pope Damasus*

Writing from the Syrian desert amid a three-way schism over the see of Antioch, Jerome asks the bishop of Rome to tell him with whom to communicate, and gives his reason: I follow no leader but Christ, but I am in communion with the chair of Peter; on that rock I know the Church is built. When the hard case arose, the instinct of the fourth century's greatest biblical scholar was the instinct of Acts 15: take it up, to Peter's chair.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyprian of Carthage *Letter 59, to Pope Cornelius*

Cyprian names the see of Rome the chair of Peter and the principal church, the source from which the unity of the priesthood took its rise, and he is indignant that schismatics dare to sail there as if the faucet of unity could be turned against itself. In this letter, Cyprian treats communion with that chair as the touchstone of unity against schism, a witness the Church reads alongside his equally strong insistence that the one episcopate is held jointly by all the bishops.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1.

Read Acts 15:1-31 once more this week and mark every speaker in the margin: debate, Peter, silence, testimony, James, letter. Teach the sequence to one person in your life; it takes three minutes and it reframes everything.

2.

Peter's partiality died on a rooftop. Identify one category of person you quietly treat as "common or unclean," and do one deliberate act of table fellowship this week.

3.

Keep the daily Our Father for the pope, adding this week: "Lord, give your Church councils like the first one: bold debate, clear rulings, and burdens no heavier than necessary."

MEMORY VERSE

"For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things." (Acts 15:28, RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read **Galatians 2:11-14** and **Luke 22:54-62**, and sit with both without flinching. Write down the hardest question these passages raise for you about Peter and his successors; next session exists for exactly that question.

Catechism Connection: CCC 85-87; 880-881; 890