

We Must Obey God Rather Than Men

Acts of the Apostles 5:1-6:7

What We Found

We faced the hardest scene in early Acts without flinching. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was never the money, which Peter says was theirs to keep (5:4); it was the lie, a performed holiness offered on holy ground, and Peter named the offended party: "you have not lied to men but to God" (5:4). We found their Old Testament twin in Achan (Joshua 7), and with him a pattern Scripture invites us to see: at the beginning of a covenant God guards its threshold, teaching once and unforgettably that His presence is real and cannot be play-acted before. And hidden in Peter's grammar we found a confession the Fathers treasured: lying to the Holy Spirit is lying to God, because the Spirit is God.

Arrested again, the apostles gave the Church her charter of conscience, "We must obey God rather than men" (5:29), and modeled its narrowness: no riot, no flight, no contempt, only open obedience to God and joy under dishonor for the Name (5:41). The great rabbi Gamaliel stated the book's thesis for us: if this undertaking is of God, no one will be able to overthrow it (5:39).

Then the Church met a painful internal dispute, overlooked widows, and answered it not with a policy alone but with a solemn appointment: seven men "full of the Spirit and of wisdom," set apart with prayer and the laying on of hands (6:3-6), a gesture that recalls Moses commissioning Joshua (Numbers 27; Deuteronomy 34:9). The Church's tradition sees here the roots of the diaconate, and the result was not stagnation but explosion: the word increased, disciples multiplied, and even a great many priests became obedient to the faith (6:7).

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Trallians, 3 (around AD 107)

Barely two generations after Acts 6, St. Ignatius writes that the Church is recognized by her threefold ministry: let all revere the deacons as Jesus Christ, the bishop as a type of the Father, and the presbyters as the council of God, for without these there is no Church. What Acts 6 plants, Ignatius already describes as the universal structure of the churches.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Basil the Great, On the Holy Spirit (4th century)

Defending the divinity of the Holy Spirit, St. Basil reasons from Peter's own words to Ananias: to lie to the Holy Spirit is to lie not to men but to God. The Spirit is therefore not a creature or a force but is Himself God, adored and glorified with the Father and the Son.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles, Homily 14 (4th century)

On the choosing of the Seven, Chrysostom marvels at the arrangement: the apostles set the criteria and invite the community to present men full of the Spirit, then make the appointment their own through prayer and the laying on of hands. The complaint of the overlooked is honored, and the ministry of the word loses nothing

while the ministry of tables gains everything.

Live It This Week

Two assignments aimed at the two halves of this session. First, hidden generosity: do one genuinely generous thing this week that no one will ever know about, no mention, no post, no hint, the exact inversion of Ananias (Matthew 6:3-4). Second, honesty before God: make one careful examination of conscience focused on a single question, where am I performing a holiness I am not living? And if something surfaces that has been hidden a long time, take it to Confession, where what destroyed Ananias is confessed aloud with contrition and destroyed instead by Christ's absolution.

Memory Verse

"We must obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29)

Before Next Session

Read Acts 6:8 through the end of chapter 7, once. It is one man's speech and its cost. Read it slowly enough to hear him.

Catechism References

CCC 1554, 1569-1571 (the diaconate and Holy Orders) · CCC 685 (the Spirit is God) · CCC 827 (a holy Church clasping sinners) · CCC 2242 (obeying God rather than men)