

What God Has Cleansed

Acts of the Apostles 9:32-11:30

What We Found

We found a buried treasure first: Peter, whose formal name is Simon Bar-Jona, son of Jonah (Matthew 16:17), was lodging in Joppa, the very port from which Jonah fled rather than carry God's word to the Gentiles (Jonah 1:3). The son of Jonah, in Jonah's port, received Jonah's assignment, and this time he went.

God choreographed both sides of the meeting: an angel to Cornelius, whose prayers and alms had ascended "as a memorial before God" in the temple's own sacrificial vocabulary (10:4; Leviticus 2:2), and the vision of the sheet to Peter, which Peter himself interpreted for us: "God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean" (10:28). While Peter was still preaching, the Spirit fell on the Gentiles, "just as on us at the beginning" as Peter would testify (11:15), God's own public signature authorizing their full admission, and Peter's response was to command their baptism at once (10:44-48). When Jerusalem objected, his testimony ended the matter: "who was I that I could withstand God?", and the church glorified God: "then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life" (11:18). The vision came to Peter, the door opened by Peter's word, and the keys of Matthew 16 turned in history's largest lock.

And at Antioch, where the scattered believers dared to preach to Greeks and Barnabas fetched Saul from Tarsus to help teach them, the disciples "were for the first time called Christians" (11:26), a name likely coined by outsiders and worn until it shone. The chapter that began with a fight over eating with Gentiles ended with the Gentile church sending famine relief to Jerusalem: one Body, its life circulating both directions.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

Chrysostom stands in awe of the choreography of Acts 10: an angel to Cornelius at one hour, a vision to Peter at another, the messengers reaching the gate at the very moment of Peter's perplexity. When God opens a door this large, He turns every hinge Himself.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Smyrnaeans, 8 (around AD 107)

From the very city where the disciples were first called Christians, its second-generation bishop gave the Church her other great adjective: wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church, the first surviving use of the phrase. What the house of Cornelius proved, Antioch named.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine of Hippo, On Baptism, Against the Donatists (around AD 400)

St. Augustine returns often to Cornelius: a man whose prayers and alms God accepted before baptism, and who nevertheless was not left where he was, but was sent Peter, was taught, and was baptized. Heaven honored the seeker by incorporating him, not by exempting him.

Live It This Week

One assignment with two halves, both at a table. First, cross a line: identify the category of person you treat as common or unclean and take one concrete step of fellowship across it this week, a shared meal or coffee if at all possible, an unhurried conversation if not. Second, feed a Cornelius: pray daily for the sincere seeker you know, and take one step toward connecting them with the Church, an invitation, an introduction, a book placed in their hands. God still prefers to answer seekers through people.

Memory Verse

"What God has cleansed, you must not call common." (Acts 10:15)

Before Next Session

Read Acts 12 and 13, once. Note what season it is when Peter is arrested, and what the church at Antioch is doing when the Holy Spirit speaks.

Catechism References

CCC 831 (the Church is catholic) · CCC 552-553 (the keys) · CCC 781-782 (the People of God from every nation)