

Acts of the Apostles Session 7

Acts 17-20: Paul goes Greek (and Turkish)

Questions/comments this past week:

- The evangelization of family members. -Who can I actually influence right now? Excuses to not evangelize (Rowena and St. Paul)
- The word 'intently' is frequently used in describing how the apostles are looking at someone. (Peter and John, Paul to Elymas) Is there any significance to the use of this word? (Pat)

Quiz! Answers given at the end!

1. Which gods did the people of Lystra mistake Paul and Barnabas for? What action caused them to believe this, and what was the reaction of the people that made Paul and Barnabas tear their garments?
2. In the letter following the Jerusalem Council sent to Antioch, whom did they say decided ("it is the decision of _____ and _____") to make the provisions for gentile converts to Christianity?
3. Who is the significant person Paul meets in Derbe/Lystra who is the child of a Jewish mother and a Greek father?

Outline of chapters 17-20

- 17:1-9 – Paul In Thessalonica
 - "...expounding and demonstrating that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead, and that 'This is the Messiah, Jesus, whom I proclaim to you.'"
 - Rioting in the streets
- Beroea (commotion and stir up the crowds)
- 17:16-34 –Paul in Athens, in front of the Areopagus, preaching to a pagan crowd
- 18: Paul in Corinth (one year of preaching, teaching, fighting)
 - Priscilla and Aquila—Jewish Christians recently exiled from Rome
- 18:18-23—return to Antioch and a Nazirite vow
- 18:24-28—a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria
- 19: Paul in Ephesus
 - Power of the Holy Spirit
 - Jewish exorcists
 - Artemis and the silversmiths
- 20: Journey to Macedonia and Greece
 - 20:6—"we" again
 - Eutychus and the unending homily
 - Farewell to Ephesus

Lora McCalister-Cruel reflection on the life and ministry of St. Paul

- "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:16)
- The Encounter with Jesus
- Seeing your life through Jesus' eyes

NT Wright: *"Luke has shown us how the gospel matches up against two major opponents: the zealous Jews in synagogues around Turkey and now in northern Greece, and the economic and political forces of the Roman Empire. But there is an entire world of thought which we haven't*

yet had on stage. This is the hugely important sphere of the prevailing ancient philosophies. They conditioned how thousands of ordinary people saw the world, what they thought of as reasonable and unreasonable, what they thought about the gods, what they thought human life was for and how best you should live it. Millions who had never studied philosophy, who maybe could not even read or write, were nevertheless deeply influenced by the major currents of thought that were debated in the schools, just as plenty of people today who have never studied philosophy or economics are massively influenced by popular media presentations of large and complex ideas.”

Paul’s Speech to the Areopagus: evangelization meets Greek philosophy, culture and idolatry

St. John Paul II (Archbishop Karol Wojtyła), *Teachings for an unbelieving world*

- Athens and Jerusalem
 - A memory of greatness: city of Plato, Aristotle, Sophocles
 - Western democracy
 - In Paul’s time, a museum of self-glorification with tremendous symbolic importance
 - “...the person who speaks in this place—Paul of Tarsus—not only represents history but also is a symbol. He, a Pharisee who converted to Christ, who had previously persecuted the nascent Church, speaking at the Areopagus, testifies to the encounter of the spiritual heritage of Israel with the heritage of Greece. We come from this double heritage.” (Wojtyła)
- Paul, while waiting for Timothy and Silas, “grew exasperated at the sight of the city full of idols”
- As was his custom, he starts in the Synagogue, then goes into the public square, engages *Epicurean* and *Stoic* philosophers
- The **Epicureans** held there is simply not enough evidence for us to be able to tell whether the gods exist or not, and if they do, what if anything they want from us. Did not believe in an afterlife, gods formed from atoms and could not intervene in human affairs. What parts of Paul’s address would they have substantially agreed with and what would they have found objectionable?
- The **Stoics** (Zeno) believed that divinity lay within the present world and within each human being. Live according to nature with logos (reason) as their guiding principle. Everything subject to laws of nature or fate. Stressed self-sufficiency, self-control, and obedience to reason and duty. More open to religious belief than Epicureans. What parts of Paul’s address would they have agreed with and what would they have found troubling?
 - ***Question for reflection: How would you describe the prevailing philosophy of the people around you? Or in the larger society?***
- Athenians: Itching ears, like to hear new things.

Paul’s speech: (17:22-34)

- “altar to an Unknown god...What therefore you unknowingly worship, I proclaim to you.”
- **Epimenides**: semi-historical, semi-mythical character from 6th or 7th century Crete.

- A shepherd, sleeps for 57 years in a cave and comes out a healer, prophet, poet and a priest who is an expert on sacrificial matters and wise lawgiver.
- Recruited by Athens during a time of plague
- Take several black and white sheep and let them graze around the Areopagus, everywhere they lay down, slaughter them and build an altar there to *“the god”*
- Also a poet: *“Cretans,”* he wrote, *“are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons”* (Titus 1:12).
- *“The line seems different in tone from the one he quoted on the Areopagus, but it comes from the same striking passage, in which King Minos of Crete addresses Zeus, chief among the gods, whom the Cretans thought was mortal.”* (Hahn)
- ***They fashioned a tomb for you, holy and high one, Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons. But you are not dead: you live and abide forever, For in you we live and move and have our being.***
- Filial deification
- Paul dives into knowing God by nature, not just by philosophical reasoning or myth
- *“The God who made the world and all that is in it, the Lord of heaven and earth...He made from one the whole human race...so that people might seek God, even perhaps grope for him and find him, though indeed he is not far from any one of us, ‘for we too are his offspring.’”*
- *In the words of the Declaration Nostra Aetate: “Men expect from the various religions answers to the unsolved riddles of the human condition, which today, even as in former times, deeply stir the hearts of men: What is man? What is the meaning, the aim of our life? What is moral good, what is sin? Whence suffering and what purpose does it serve? Which is the road to true happiness? What are death, judgment and retribution after death? What, finally, is that ultimate inexpressible mystery which encompasses our existence: whence do we come, and where are we going?” (NA, 1).*
 - *“Religion is the search for answers to the fundamental questions about human existence” (Wojtyła)*
 - *“I can see that you Athenians are very religious”*
- Paul’s conclusion: *“...and he has provided confirmation for all by raising him from the dead.”*
- The scoffers balk at the resurrection of the dead, others want to hear more later
- Some converts, Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris.

Chapter 18: Paul in Corinth, the community he loved and the community that frustrated him to no end.

- Vision of the Lord encouraging Paul

Paul’s Co-workers in the vineyard:

- Peter, Silas, Timothy, Titus Justus, Mark, Luke, Barnabas, Timothy, Apollos, Priscilla and Aquilla, Lydia
- Women, “lay” members of the community
- Lessons for us?

Calling down of the Holy Spirit in Ephesus (19: 2-7)

- 12 men, start of the Church in Asia

Journeys: chapter 20

- Writing 2 Corinthians and Letter to the Romans
- ...and partings.
- Christian life is a journey, an adventure, a quest.

“Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel”

Answers to Quiz Questions!

For Next Week, read Acts 21-24

Small Group Questions:

Choose one group member to be the spokesperson to share your answers when we get back to the main group. We will take 20 minutes in the breakout rooms before we come back to the large group to discuss.

1. Anything from these readings that really stuck out to or challenged you?
2. Earlier, we spoke about the philosophies prevalent in our own society, what are some of those philosophies that you have encountered? Some examples could be materialism, care for the environment, justice for the poor and marginalized, Christian fundamentalism, Scientism, etc.
 - a. How can these philosophies be used to help introduce somebody to the message of Jesus and His Church?
3. What is one way that you sought to evangelize this past week? How did it go?
4. How might someone hold onto belief in an “unknown god” like the Athenians, and how could you help that person to find Him?