

Peters, Walter H.
- An introduction
p. 1 ADU 8008

1. *The Apostolic Age*

An Introduction to

Church
History



By

Reverend Walter H. Peters,
S.S.B., S.T.L.

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5. The Modern Age
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Books 3 and 4 will be published Nov. 15, 1941

Books 5 and 6 will be published Jan. 15, 1942

AN INTRODUCTION TO
CHURCH
HISTORY

Book I

THE APOSTOLIC AGE

By

Reverend Walter H. Peters,
S.S.B., S.T.L.



CATECHETICAL GUILD
Saint Paul, Minnesota



1. OUR GLORIOUS HERITAGE

Every Catholic should be intensely interested in the origin and development of the most wonderful organization in the world. It was founded by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and will last forever.

Today more than ever is the study of Church History important. Textbooks of history are giving attention to biography, and readers face a flood of biographies which all too often rest on mere conjecture or tend to substantiate some theory of the author. Many phases of the history of the Catholic Church have been thus distorted and misrepresented. Without solid grounding in the Church's history, the student, shocked at what he reads in secular books, will often be unable to form a correct judgment or refute false charges.

Attacks made upon the Church usually center about misinformation or some garbled version of a dogma or an event in Church History such as the Infallibility of the Pope, the Inquisition, the doctrine of Indulgences, or something similar. A flat denial of all charges is inadequate, to say the least, and lays us open to the accusation of narrowness. We must admit that the Church in her human element has suffered from abuses in the course of centuries, but because the Church has a divine character she has always conquered. The guarantee which Christ gave the Apostles still holds good: "Behold, I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world."

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When refined and well-meaning non-Catholics bring up some point of controversy, the intelligent Catholic will not wish to brand himself as a boor by harshly denying everything on principle; surely, he will not wish to misrepresent his Church by admitting a false accusation. Inquiries by non-Catholics are golden opportunities for the well-informed Catholic. Learn to distinguish carefully, giving both sides of the question. Show how the customs of the time influenced conduct. Point out that an ecclesiastical teacher may have had the best of intentions but declared a mere opinion and had no thought of expressing a dogmatic truth.

Nothing makes a young man or woman so welcome in society as the ability to carry on an intelligent discussion. In these days of world unrest, the average person has many questions to ask. Even a fair knowledge of Church History will give you the key to many of these problems. Not only will you be able to enlighten others, but you will be prepared to defend the good name of the Church.

But the study of Church History does not merely help you fight off attack. It aids you in many other ways. It teaches you how to live a good life. What more splendid examples can you find than the saints of God, holy popes and bishops, devoted men and women in the world, saintly kings and queens!

Your secular history will become more interesting. The reign of Constantine, the policy of Queen Isabella of Spain, the intolerance on the part of some of the American colonists will become so much clearer if you are in possession of the rich background of Church History. Travel, too, takes on a new meaning for the student who is familiar with the life and growth of the Church.

The influence of Catholicity on American life has been emerging gradually in the last decades. Much of our progress is directly traceable to the Church, the mother of culture. The earnest reading of these concise chapters should create new interest in digging deeper into the rich treasury of the Church's glorious history.

Points for Discussion

1. *Why is Church History so important today?*
2. *What is to be said for some of the "facts" found in modern books?*
3. *What have you to say about the attitude of some Catholics who become angry when objections are raised against the Church? Explain.*
4. *Distinguish between the divine and the human elements in the Church.*
5. *Why does a knowledge of Church History help us in that most important work of living a good life?*
6. *In what way does the earnest student of Church History find richer experience in travel?*
7. *Since the purpose of these brief chapters is to stimulate a taste for historical knowledge, what should be the attitude of those who undertake to read these pages?*



2. THE FEAST OF PENTECOST

Our Divine Saviour had died on Good Friday. He arose gloriously on Easter Sunday. He mingled with His Apostles for forty days, and on Ascension Thursday He ascended to the Eternal Father. The following ten days were days of fright for the Apostles. They were like the members of a family who have just lost their beloved father. Those first days are days of unrest for the wife and children. During the day, sadness and loneliness are written on every wall. During the night, every sound strikes terror into the hearts of the bereaved.

And the Apostles had had such a good Master. How He took care of them! How fearful they were even when He was with them! Sometimes He humored them, saying affectionately: "Fear not, thou little flock." (Luke 12:32.) At other times He reprimanded them: "Why are you fearful, O ye of little faith?" (Matthew 8:26.) They remained in the upper room at Jerusalem, fearful of what was to come.

Ten days later, on Pentecost Sunday morning, a howling gust of wind was heard. It seemed to fill the entire house. Tongues of fire appeared in the air, one tongue above every head of those present. Holy Scripture adds "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:4.) It was fitting that the Holy Spirit should make His presence known by a blast of wind, for the Latin word **spiritus** means "breath" or "spirit."

That the Holy Spirit should have chosen the visible form of a tongue of fire is also fitting. John the Baptist said that Christ was to baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire. (Luke 3:16.) Fire in the minds of the ancients denoted a mysterious force which hardened and cleansed with remarkable intensity.

The Apostles instantly went out and began to preach. This was a most remarkable fact when we consider how timid they were when Christ was with them in His human body and how frightened they were after His arrest and again after His Ascension. Now they went out and spoke fearlessly.

Pentecost was the second of the three great Jewish feasts. Many pilgrims from every land of the then-known globe crowded the streets of Jerusalem. All these strangers heard the Apostles speaking to them in their own language. "Lo, are not all these who speak Galileans?" This was the question of surprise which could be heard everywhere. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, spoke out boldly. In the accompanying picture, you can see Peter addressing the amazed crowds. People in various costumes stand in wonder; beggars creep up to hear the message; even the children are interested in seeing the cause of the commotion.

Then and there Peter accused them of having put their Lord and Christ to death. He explained the Old Testament prophecies to them. He told them that their only hope was repentance. God's grace was poured out on those who listened. On that day, about three thousand were baptized.

Pentecost is the real birthday of the Church. The body of the Church was formed by Christ but the body was in need of a soul to bring it to life. The Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life, had to come to be the soul of the Church.

Points for Discussion

1. *Look up the two passages which refer to the timidity of the Apostles and see in what circumstances the words were spoken.*
2. *In your own words narrate the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit.*
3. *Why did the Holy Spirit choose to make His presence known by a blast of wind and to descend in the form of fire? Did the Holy Spirit make Himself known visibly in any other form?*
4. *How do you explain that there were so many people present at this particular time?*
5. *In what sacrament do we receive the Holy Spirit?*
6. *What day is the birthday of the Church? Why?*



3. THE DEATH AND THE ASSUMPTION OF OUR BLESSED LADY

Mary, the mother of Jesus, lived for several years after the death of her Divine Son. Her presence was a great consolation to the Apostles. They must have gone to her often when they were troubled, for none knew the mind of the Saviour better than she.

Never for an instant was Mary touched by the stain of original sin. Therefore, she did not suffer the effects of sin. Death, however, is a result of sin. Why then did Mary die? The lives of Jesus and Mary were parallel. Christ was absolutely sinless; so was Mary. Christ's life was a path of hardship; so was the life of Mary of the Seven Sorrows. Christ died, not because of sin, but because He wanted to die; in this, too, did Mary follow the Divine pattern. Although there is nothing in Sacred Scripture which describes the death of Mary, tradition tells us much. In the Oriental liturgy, the feast of the Assumption is called the Dormition of our Lady; though she died, her short stay in death was as a sleep.

Our picture shows Mary as her soul is about to depart. St. Peter is depicted standing at the left, reading Sacred Scripture to her. Presumably, the young man kneeling nearest her is St. John to whose care our dying Saviour committed her. St. Luke undoubtedly was stricken with grief. His Gospel more than the others gives us intimate details about the infancy of our Lord; he records Mary's thoughts on various

phases of that mystery, which leads us to believe that Mary was in the habit of conversing freely with the author of the third Gospel.

Tradition tells us that Mary was taken up into heaven bodily. Her body was never subject to corruption, since decay of the body is a result of sin. Here again is a parallel to the Ascension of her Son. Our Divine Saviour ascended into heaven by an act of His own power; Mary was taken up into heaven bodily by her Divine Son. The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary has not been infallibly defined by the Church. However, it is believed by the universal Church. August 15, the Feast of the Assumption, has been celebrated for centuries.

When God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Paradise, complete victory on the part of Mary over the power of Satan was promised: "She shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel." (Genesis 3:15.) To crush the head of a serpent is a sign of absolute victory—its venomous power has been destroyed. If Mary's body were to become the prey of corruption, her victory over Satan would not have been complete. Furthermore, there would have been something unfitting in the decay of a body which gave to the world the Lord of life. We pay tribute to her daily as we say: "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus."

People throughout the ages have taken a keen interest in the tombs of famous people. These burying places are not always authentic but so strong is the desire for hero-worship that some tomb is sure to be pointed out as the final resting place of this or that famous person. Is it not remarkable that no attempt has ever been made to establish the location of the tomb of Mary?

The shortsighted have stated that devotion to Mary is but a Christian substitute for the old pagan worship of goddesses. It would be a great insult to this most holy **creature** to assign her some of the attributes which the pagans gave Diana or their other barbaric **divinities**. Heretics invented the term **Mariolatry**, on the model of that abominable word **idolatry**, to describe what they call our exaggerations. But at no time in the long history of the love of the faithful for the Mother of God has there been any danger that the devotion paid to her would encroach upon the worship due to God.

Points for Discussion

1. *How do we know that Mary did not die before our Lord?*
2. *Compare the lives of Jesus and Mary, giving points of similarity.*
3. *Was the death of Mary a result of sin?*
4. *Which Evangelist must have been well acquainted with Mary? Why?*
5. *What is the difference between the words "Ascension" and "Assumption" as applied to Christ and Mary?*
6. *How does the prophecy at the time of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise foreshadow the Assumption?*
7. *Who invented the word "Mariolatry" and what does it mean?*



4. THE MIRACLE UPON THE LAME MAN

One day, Peter and John went up to the temple to assist at the evening sacrifice; for thus far, the Apostles observed the Jewish customs as well as the precepts enjoined by our Lord. At one of the temple gates, known as "The Beautiful," a cripple was begging. He was lame from birth and secured his livelihood only through the charity of others. As Peter and John passed, the beggar stretched out his hand. Peter stopped and asked the lame man to look up. Beggars were accustomed to sit with bowed head, merely murmuring words of petition. Peter said: "Silver and gold I have none."

It is not difficult to imagine the look of disappointment on the face of the beggar who had hoped that all this ceremony would certainly net him something worthwhile. In this he was not wrong, for Peter added: "But what I have, that I give thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise, and walk!" Now, had this man, a cripple from birth, been cured by a physician, he would have expected to spend weeks in gradually strengthening his muscles and even more weeks in learning how to use limbs which had never functioned. But Scripture says: "And immediately his feet and ankles were strengthened, and leaping up he stood and began to walk."

The people were astonished to see this beggar, whom they had observed for years begging at the door, now actually in the temple with

the other worshippers. As soon as they realized that this was the same man, the people followed Peter and John and pressed about them on the porch of Solomon. With the same earnestness with which he had spoken on Pentecost, Peter addressed them:

“Ye men of Israel, why do ye marvel at this man, or why do ye gaze at us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made him to walk?” Courageously did he tell them that this miracle was performed through Him whom the Jews had crucified. “Repent, therefore, and be converted that your sins may be wiped out.” In repentance would lie their opportunity of salvation.

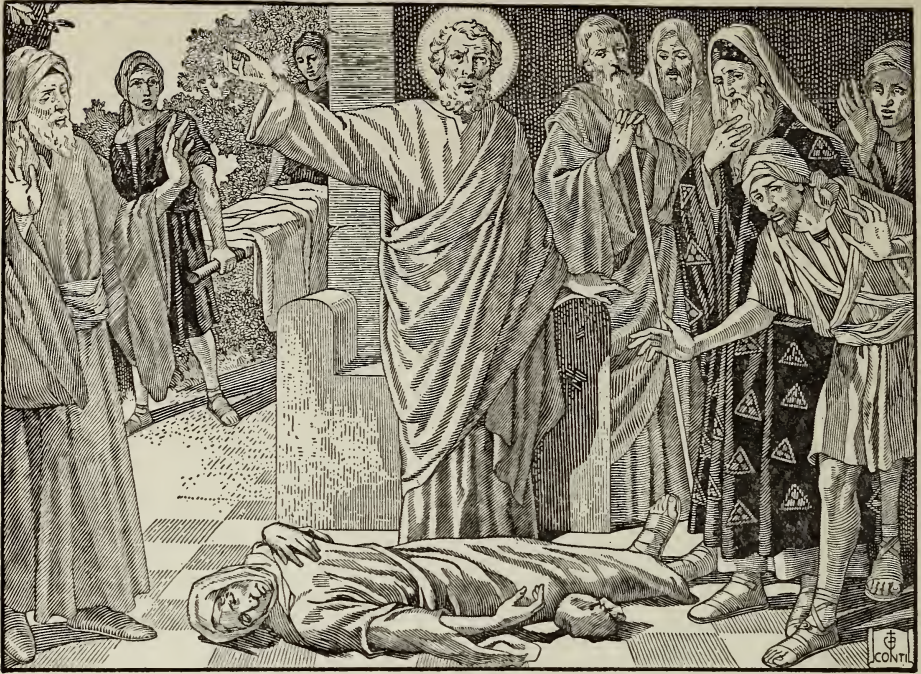
The priests were angry that one unauthorized should be explaining the Scriptures in the temple. Peter and John were arrested and brought before Annas, the high priest. The charge was direct and pointed: “By what authority or in whose name have ye done this?” Peter rose to the occasion and delivered a bold defense. All had to marvel that men untrained in the debates and lore of the Jewish teachers, were able to speak as did Peter and John. The people were enthusiastic about their message. There was little else to do than dismiss them with a reprimand.

Contrast in your mind’s eye the change in the Apostles since the Holy Ghost came upon them. Picture the weakness of Peter before the servant maid of Caiphas. But now, even though it means their own crucifixion and death, the Apostles say: “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:20.) How we need this courage today. Men laugh at religion and the power of God. Whole nations are being turned away. Catholics, as recipients of the Sacrament of Confirmation, share in the wonderful grace which the Holy Ghost bestows. With such God-given strength flowing through us, can’t we, too, like the Apostles, fight Christ’s battle on earth today? While we are not expected nor able to work miracles, we still have Christ with us every bit as much as the Apostles had Him, and He sanctifies us as He did them.

How could Peter work a miracle? A miracle is an event which can be perceived by man but which is extraordinary and divinely produced. Peter effected the cure not through any human knowledge of healing but through Divine power. Our Lord worked miracles which put a seal on His doctrine; He never worked them merely to astound. So, too, the Apostles had the gift of miracles in order that they might present external proof of the Divine approval which was theirs.

Points for Discussion

1. Read Chapters 3 and 4 of the Acts of the Apostles for this story.
2. What circumstances prove that Peter actually performed a cure?
3. Why were the priests not happy that the cripple was made well? Why did they object to Peter and John’s explanations?
4. Why did God allow Peter to work this miracle?
5. What is a miracle? Name some miracles which our Lord worked.



5. THE JUDGMENT OF GOD UPON ANANIAS AND SAPHIRA

Communists say the Bible is in favor of the possession of all things in common. In Acts 4:32, we read: "Now the multitude of believers were of one heart and soul, and not one of them said that anything of his possessions was his own, but they had all things in common." Now this sharing of goods was not for material ends, but merely encouraged as a step toward Christian perfection. Communism advocates the violent seizing and distribution of private property; whereas, the community spirit of the early Church implied voluntary renunciation out of love for Jesus Christ.

Many of the early converts possessed wealth or owned property; they would contribute the money which they realized from its sale and the Apostles would then give it to the deacons to distribute among the needy.

One day, a certain man called Ananias came with his wife Sapphira and laid a substantial sum of money at the feet of St. Peter. They had sold their property and after laying aside a portion of the proceeds for themselves, they brought the remainder to the Apostles for use in the common fund. The two had agreed to make it look as though the money which they were presenting was the sum total of what they had received for their property.

It must be remembered that the Apostles and their immediate helpers enjoyed special endowments of the Holy Spirit so that the new Faith might be spread as quickly as possible. Peter, by a discernment bestowed by Divine power, asked: "Tell me, did ye sell the land for so much?" This question does not imply that they were expected to contribute the entire amount. In fact, Peter said to Ananias: "While it (the land) yet remained, did it not remain thine own; and when it had been sold, was not the money at thy disposal? How is it that thou didst set this purpose in thy heart? Thou hast not lied to men, but to God." (Acts 5:4.) Hardly had Peter ceased to speak, when Ananias fell dead. One can well imagine the horror on the part of the bystanders. We must understand that it was the deceit, and not the withholding of the wealth, that furnished the reason for this drastic punishment, by which God expressed His displeasure at the fraud and gave His approval to the work of the Apostles.

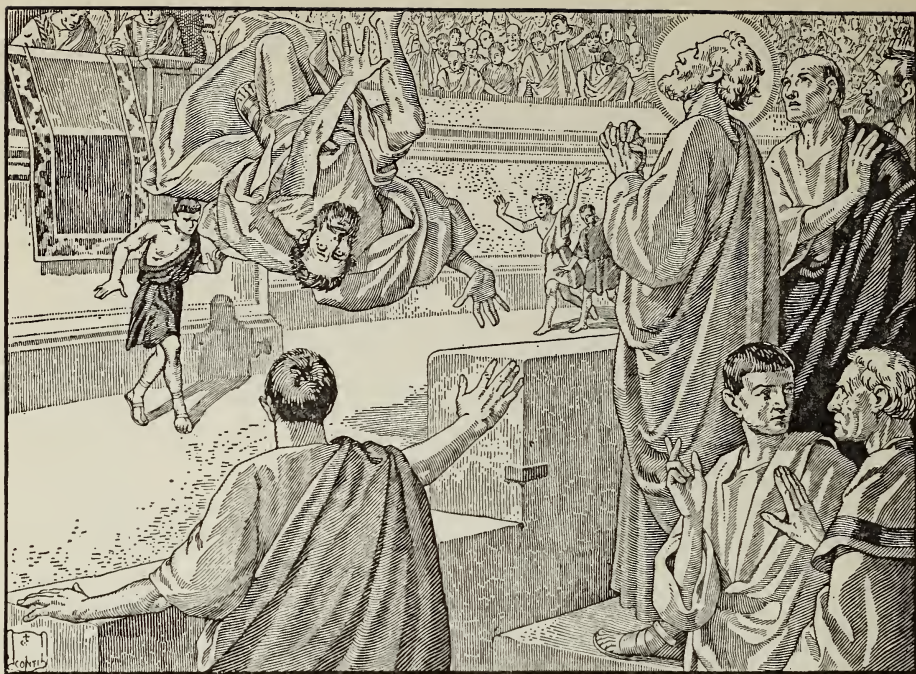
Several young men carried the body away for burial. About three hours later, Saphira came to learn the cause of her husband's failure to return. Peter asked her pointedly whether the amount delivered constituted the sum received for the land. Saphira, mindful of her agreement with her husband, answered in the affirmative. Peter again pronounced judgment: "How is it that ye have agreed to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried thy husband are at the door, and they shall bear thee forth." She fell at his feet and died instantly.

The story of this sad incident closes with the masterful words of St. Luke: "And great fear came upon the whole Church and upon all that heard of these things." And this is not difficult to picture. Men who doubted the divine mission of the Apostles were now imbued with awe and respect. This incident is another example of the function of miracles as seals of divine revelation.

We see, too, that from the earliest days the Church labored for the alleviation of the misery of the poor, the widows and orphans. Today the St. Vincent de Paul Society deserves our wholehearted cooperation. Great sacrifice is not expected, but some donation to so worthy a cause will make us imitators of the early Christians.

Points for Discussion

1. *Do nuns and members of religious orders because of their community life become Communists? If not, in what way do they differ?*
2. *Explain the practice of the early Church regarding private property.*
3. *Do you know the attitude of the Church today on private property? Consult some reference book to see what Pope Leo XIII taught.*
4. *Why were Ananias and Saphira struck dead?*
5. *What words of Holy Scripture cited in this lesson, would apply to a lie told in the confessional?*



6. SIMON THE MAGICIAN

Simony is an offense against God committed by those who buy or sell sacred things. When we study the Middle Ages, we shall see how this sin worried the Popes. To appreciate the situation fully, recall the incident which gave the sin its name.

The story is told in Acts 8:14-24. The Apostles in Jerusalem heard that converts in Samaria were instructed and baptized. Peter and John came and laid their hands on them so that they might be confirmed. A certain Simon, known as the Magician, saw that the Holy Spirit was given through the imposition of hands. He had seen the wonderful things which people did after they possessed the Holy Spirit and coveted this power as an asset far greater than his so-called magic. Therefore, he callously offered money to the Apostles and said: "Give me also this power, so that on whomsoever I lay my hands, he receive the Holy Spirit."

Peter, justifiably provoked, replied: "Thy silver go with thee unto destruction, because thou hast thought to obtain the gift of God with money. Thou hast no part or lot in this matter; for thy heart is not straight before God. Repent therefore of this wickedness."

At these words Simon was struck with terror and in a whimpering voice begged: "Do ye pray for me to the Lord, that nothing come upon

me whereof ye have spoken." However, it would seem that Simon did remain in his iniquity. St. Justin reports that Simon founded a sect which adored him like a god, and that a statue was erected to him with the inscription: "Simon the Holy God."

A legend says that Simon desired to impress the Emperor Nero with his store of magic arts. His skill as a magician was challenged when the populace compared his work with the miracles performed by Peter and Paul. Simon promised to show his power to the imperial court; he would rise bodily into the very heavens by his own efforts. By some trick he did manage to rise in the air but suddenly he fell and injured himself fatally. This is the scene which the picture portrays.

Even though this incident is legendary, it is evident that the story and the intimations of various ecclesiastical writers have some foundation. We can safely conclude that Simon did not repent, that he tried to oppose the Apostles in their work and that God punished him.

Simony is defined as the deliberate buying or selling of something spiritual or something connected with the spiritual.

By **something spiritual** we mean the sacraments and the actions of the priest by which are conferred the graces and blessings contained in the sacraments. By **something connected with the spiritual** we mean certain temporal things which of their very nature or in virtue of some institution of the Church have reference to the spiritual.

While the term Simony applies only to the exchange of supernatural treasures for worldly benefits, the Church has further extended its meaning. To guard against abuse we are forbidden to accept payment for articles that have been blessed. Such objects lose, if sold, all indulgences previously attached to them.

Not only is Simony forbidden by the law of the Church, but it has a double malice in that it offers an insult to God; for, by it the sinner infers that God's supernatural gifts can be exchanged for base things. The money which we give when we wish a Mass said is never to be spoken of as the price of the Mass. All the money in the world could not purchase a single Mass. This money is merely an offering, a personal sacrifice on the part of the donor.

Points for Discussion

1. *What is the origin of the word "Simony"?*
2. *Give details of the bargain Simon tried to strike with St. Peter.*
3. *What does St. Justin say about Simon?*
4. *What does legend say about Simon?*
5. *Define and explain Simony.*
6. *How do we account for the money given to the priest for a Mass?*



7. THE MARTYRDOM OF ST. STEPHEN

The Apostles found that their number was insufficient for the multiple tasks which increased as the Church grew. They needed others to help them, and a group of reliable young men was selected. Among these was Stephen. In the words of St. Luke: "These they set before the Apostles, who after prayer laid their hands upon them." (Acts 6:6.) The imposition of hands was a ceremony performed for various purposes. We see that it was done over the sick, over penitents in the forgiveness of sins, over the candidates in Confirmation, and in this instance in Ordination. We find these men referred to as deacons. The diaconate is the order immediately preceding the priesthood. The deacon can baptize and he may distribute Holy Communion. He can assist the celebrant at a Solemn High Mass and chant the Gospel. He may also preach in the church.

In the early Church, deacons had the added duty of distributing goods to the poor, and Stephen was especially mindful of their needs. St. Luke remarks: "Now Stephen, full of grace and power, was working great wonders and signs among the people." Since the beginning of recorded history we find evidence of the vice of jealousy. When a man distinguishes himself, others become envious and plot his downfall. Representatives of certain Jewish synagogues debated with Stephen and

were unable to refute his arguments. They persuaded others to say: "We have heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and against God." These words give us an idea as to the nature of the argument.

The Jews always maintained that they were the chosen people and that they alone would be saved. They had rejected Christ and they voluntarily renounced their privileged state. Very likely Stephen insisted on the Universality of the Redemption and in revenge they twisted his words. Brought before the Jewish Council, Stephen gave a masterful discourse which can be read in Chapter 7 of the Acts of the Apostles. It was not a defense of himself, but rather an explanation of the chain of events which led up to the coming of Christ. Stephen showed how all prophecies were fulfilled in Christ; his words were clear and firm: "Stiff of neck, uncircumcised of heart and ear, ye always resist the Holy Spirit; as did your fathers, so do ye. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute?" It is easy to see that the Jews were enraged at hearing so stern a rebuke. They accused him of blasphemy, the punishment for which was stoning. Therefore, they drove him out of the city to the place where the execution of the death sentence was to take place.

The condemned man was put upon the edge of a cliff-like elevation, on a scaffold erected for the purpose. The witnesses had the privilege of casting the first stones, while an official witness took charge of their outer garments. In this case, the official witness was Saul of Tarsus of whom we shall hear much later, the one who was to become an Apostle, the "vessel of election," the great St. Paul. Stones were cast until the condemned man lost his balance and fell into the pit below. We read: "And falling upon his knees, he (Stephen) cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.'" (Acts 7:59.) Stones continued to be cast until the poor victim fell bruised and crushed by the missiles so mercilessly hurled at him.

We call St. Stephen the "protomartyr." "Proto" comes from a Greek word meaning "first." The protoparents are then the first parents; prototypes are the first types of something to come later. The feast of St. Stephen is celebrated on the day after the Nativity of our Lord. This place of honor in the calendar of the Church is given to St. Stephen because he was the first adult to shed his blood for the Faith of Christ.

Points for Discussion

1. *Who aided the Apostles in their work?*
2. *What is the diaconate?*
3. *To what does "imposing hands" refer? Give various examples.*
4. *Why did St. Stephen arouse hatred among the Jews?*
5. *What do we mean by the "Universality of the Redemption"?*
6. *Tell how the Jews stoned someone.*



8. THE CONVERSION OF SAINT PAUL

Every lover of the drama will enjoy the incident recorded in Acts 9. Saul was also known as Paul. It was not infrequent that a man possessed two forms of the same name. The Hebrew form of "Saul" had a harsh sound; Paul was easier to pronounce and did not offend the cultured Greek and Latin ear.

Saul was born about the year 1 A. D. He was thoroughly educated in the Jewish schools. He prided himself on the progress he had made in the study of the Jewish traditions. At that time, a very famous teacher, Gamaliel, was lecturing to the students. Saul had the good fortune of attending this Rabbi's courses. Saul was also a member of that rigid sect of Jews known as the Pharisees—a group who put great stress on the minutest formalities. Saul hated the name of Christ because he had inherited the white-hot fury of the Pharisees against Him who laid bare their empty formalism and revealed the lack of charity in their hearts.

How firmly Saul was grounded in the traditions of his people, we can gather from his own words: "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee." (Acts 23:6.) The high regard in which he was apparently held is evidenced by the official position he occupied in the stoning of St. Stephen.

When Saul was about thirty-five years old, he heard that the followers of Christ were spreading their doctrines at Damascus, 150 miles from Jerusalem. Therefore, he went to the high priest and asked that he be given a letter to the synagogues in Damascus so that he might be free to take action there against these Christians. He wanted to bring them, bound, to Jerusalem.

Saul was determined to make a name for himself. He was certain that the arrest of the followers of Christ in Damascus, an important haven for travelers, would be a timely stroke.

“Breathing threat and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord,” we can picture Saul striding militantly forward, his high, receding brow wrinkled in an ugly frown, chuckling gleefully as he thinks of the trap he is about to set. While he journeys, a blinding light strikes him and hurls him to the ground. Then he hears his name called twice: “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?” Humbled, helpless, stunned, he cries out: “Who art thou, Lord?” And Christ answers: “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.”

As he lay in the dust, trembling and astonished at what he had seen and heard, Saul uttered words which must have astonished himself as well as his companions. He, the haughty Saul, the determined and self-appointed persecutor of Christians, asked: “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” Christ said: “Arise, and go into the city, and there it shall be told thee what thou must do.” And Saul arose from the ground, blinded by the vision; for three days he was left in darkness that he might learn to see—to see himself, and to see Christ with a new light of faith.

Here we observe the mysterious workings of grace. Actual grace is a supernatural and passing assistance by which God enlightens our mind and moves our will to perform some good act. It must never be forgotten that without that actual grace we are powerless. We are so completely at the mercy of God that we can do nothing to win that special assistance. Here was Saul who hated Christ, who left no stone unturned in his efforts to crush the work of Christ; suddenly he finds himself struck to the ground asking meekly: “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?”

Points for Discussion

1. *Why is the same man called SAUL and PAUL?*
2. *When was Saul born? What can you say about his education? What was the name of his teacher?*
3. *Who were the Pharisees?*
4. *Where is Damascus? Why did Saul set out for that city?*
5. *Describe, dramatically as you can, the incident on the way to Damascus.*
6. *What is actual grace? Give examples of this in your own life.*



9. SAINT PETER IS DELIVERED FROM PRISON

King Herod Agrippa enjoyed the favor of the Roman emperor Claudius and lost no opportunity of extending his authority. He had condemned to death St. James, the brother of St. John, but the Jewish populace clamored for more Christian blood. Eager to satisfy them, Herod imprisoned the Prince of the Apostles, Peter. It was during the sacred days of the Pasch; the seven days following the feast were a time of prayer, and while Herod had little piety, he had some regard for the Jewish law and would not desecrate these days by shedding Peter's blood.

Peter was guarded by four groups of soldiers, each group composed of four men, who took turns—three hours at a time—guarding the prisoner. To prevent escape, Peter's wrists were shackled to those of two soldiers.

While all this was happening, something beautiful was going on elsewhere. St. Luke says so affectionately: "But prayer was made without ceasing by the Church unto God for him." (Acts 12:5.) These prayers did not go unanswered. There appeared before Peter an angel who bade him arise quickly. The chains dropped from his wrists. At the command of the angel, he dressed hurriedly and left his cell, unnoticed. The two came to the iron gate of the city. This was usually opened

and closed with great ceremony, but now the gate opened of its own accord. When Peter looked around, the angel had left him. Until then he had thought the whole thing an agreeable dream. Now he realized that he had been liberated.

A young man named Mark was a great admirer of St. Peter. Mark's mother had a palatial home. It was to this home, where many people had gathered to pray for him, that Peter now betook himself. A maid saw him at the door but was too overjoyed to open it; she ran to tell the good news to the household. Meanwhile poor Peter, tired and hungry, stood there knocking. After telling the marvelous story of his deliverance, Peter said: "Tell these things to James and the brethren."

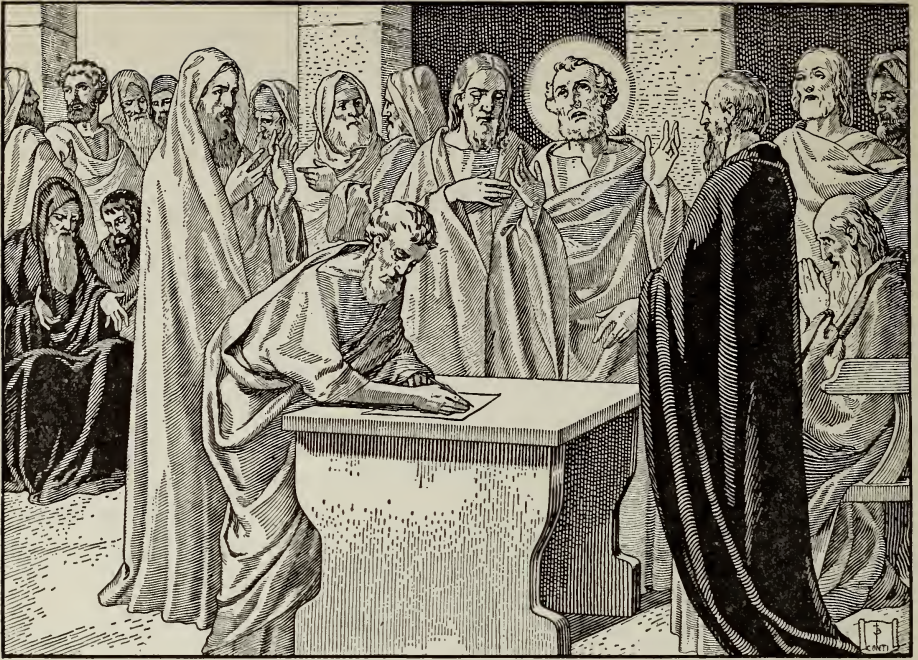
This mention of James may seem strange, because earlier in this story St. James, the brother of St. John, was put to death. The explanation is that there were two Apostles named James. James the Greater was the brother of St. John; James the Less was the Bishop of Jerusalem. St. Peter, the Bishop of Antioch, had been arrested in Jerusalem. Simple courtesy required that James, as Bishop of Jerusalem, be informed of his deliverance.

St. Luke says: "And he departed and went unto another place," important words, because they show that St. Peter changed his place of residence. It is supposed that at this time he went to Rome. We shall trace his movements more closely in Book II, in the chapter treating of his martyrdom.

This is the point to be observed: "Prayer was made without ceasing by the Church unto God for him." (Acts 12:5.) The Church prayed for its visible head. This the Church does daily in the Mass. In the first prayer of the Canon the priest mentions by name both the Pope and the Bishop of the diocese. On days when there are three orations in the Mass, the third prayer will usually be either for the Pope or for the Church. The Church prays for its shepherd and the priests pray for the members of the Church. Thus we are all bound in a union of prayer. Such prayer is pleasing in the sight of God as was the prayer of the Church for St. Peter.

Points for Discussion

1. *Why was St. Peter not put to death immediately after his arrest?*
2. *What method was employed at that time for guarding a prisoner?*
3. *Tell the story of the deliverance of St. Peter.*
4. *What happened later at the home of St. Mark?*
5. *Distinguish between "James the Greater" and "James the Less."*
6. *Make comments on "Prayer was made without ceasing by the Church unto God for him."*



10. THE COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM

It is necessary, now, to consider a problem which sorely tried the Apostles in their work. The Divine Master had said, "Teach ye all nations"; that meant not only Jews but people of all other races and nations, called Gentiles.

The persecution which began with the martyrdom of St. Stephen helped to spread the Gospel. Christian refugees carried the faith to neighboring countries and the number of Gentile converts became very large.

Among the Jewish Christians there was a faction of zealots, called Judaizers, whose national pride was hurt when Gentiles were admitted to the Church and were treated like the rest. These Judaizers insisted that Gentile converts should be forced to observe not only the precepts of Christ but also the ceremonial prescriptions of the Jews—details difficult even for Jews to observe and many of them repugnant to outsiders. The laws laid down by Moses had, through centuries of interpretation by Jewish teachers, become sadly distorted and intolerable.

Paul, Barnabas and Titus came to Jerusalem to discuss the problem with Peter and James. They approved the resolution that the Jewish Law should not be foisted upon the Gentiles. But the Judaizers clamored

the louder that the Gentiles had no right to become Christians if they did not first accept the Jewish regulations.

The time for formal action had come. A public meeting was held at Jerusalem. The discussion became more and more involved. Then St. Peter rose and delivered his address. We must pause and take note that St. Peter's authority to speak as the head of the assembly is taken for granted. Thus, throughout Apostolic times, we see him exercising his primacy. St. Peter argued by appealing to an incident recorded in Acts 10. Cornelius, an officer in Caesarea, sent for Peter to preach in his home. During the discourse, the Holy Spirit came upon the entire assembly. The Jews present were amazed that the Holy Spirit came upon all, irrespective of race. Having brought this incident to the attention of the Council, Peter asked why men should make a distinction when the Holy Spirit did not. "Now, therefore, why do ye provoke God, that ye should lay a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor ourselves have been able to bear?" (Acts 15:10.)

Then James, the Bishop of Jerusalem, arose and approved the words of Peter saying, "Wherefore my judgment is, that we do not harass further those among the Gentiles who are turning to God." He advised, however, that four modifications be attached to this liberty, namely: 1. That Gentile Christians were not to eat of meat which had at one time been offered to pagan idols. 2. That there be no marriages within certain degrees of kindred. 3. That the meat of animals which had been strangled was not to be eaten. 4. That they abstain from blood prepared in a special way as a delicacy.

These four things James mentioned because they were stressed in Leviticus 17 and were imposed on Gentiles living among Jews. James here shows himself an able interpreter of the law by extending this liberty to the Gentiles but at the same time imposing a restriction which the spirit of the law demanded. The decree was put in writing and published in the communities where difficulty had been encountered.

Points for Discussion

1. *How do we know that Gentiles were to be admitted into the Church?*
2. *How can the persecution in which St. Stephen was martyred be said to have had a good result?*
3. *Who were the Judaizers?*
4. *How can we tell that the Apostles regarded St. Peter as their head?*
5. *How did St. Peter present his argument? Read the story of Cornelius in Chapter 10 of the Acts of the Apostles.*
6. *What was the decision of the Council? What did St. James say in summing up St. Peter's decision?*



11. THE EVANGELISTS

The passing years saw the Church steadily increasing its growth, but they also saw the Apostles advancing in age. Lengthened, too, was the span of years between the happy days of the Apostles' companionship with Jesus and their present period of preaching. As the Christian communities multiplied, it became opportune for the Apostles to set forth in writing the events and teachings of Christ in order to have them read in those places that could not be easily visited by the Apostles themselves. Those who set down in writing a few of the things which Jesus taught and did, we call Evangelists. The word "evangelist" comes from the Greek and means one who brings glad tidings, namely a bringer of the Gospel. Our word "Gospel" comes from the Anglo-Saxon "good spell," namely, a "good message." The four Evangelists are symbolically represented by four figures: a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle.

1. **St. Matthew** was a tax collector at Capharnaum. Speaking of himself, he says: "Jesus saw a man called Matthew, sitting at the place of toll, and saith to him, 'Follow me.' And he arose and followed him." (Matthew 9:9-10.) Thereafter, he is listed among the Apostles. He preached the Gospel among the Jews in the Aramaic tongue, a language which the Jews picked up from their neighbors after their return from exile. Tradition says that he went to Persia and was martyred. He

wrote his Gospel to show that Christ was the Messiah promised to Adam, and in Him all the prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled. Because of this trait, a man's head is used to symbolize St. Matthew.

2. **St. Mark**, according to tradition, was baptized by St. Peter. From a letter written by St. Peter at Rome, we learn that St. Mark was the companion, disciple and interpreter of the Prince of the Apostles. Later, we hear of Mark as Bishop of Alexandria in Egypt where he was privileged to receive a martyr's crown. His Gospel is referred to as the "spoken Gospel." Its style is delightfully straightforward—a trait which shows that he had his information from St. Peter who was ever impulsive and outspoken. The incidents regarding St. Peter in the Gospel exhibit a special intimacy with the events. We can picture the evenings spent by these two men: Peter lovingly recalling many of his conversations with Christ; Mark listening with unfeigned interest to this first-hand information. St. Mark is symbolized as a lion because he opens his Gospel with an account of John the Baptist in the desert whose preaching was like "the voice of one crying in the wilderness."

3. **St. Luke** was not a Jew, but a Gentile of Antioch. He joined St. Paul at Troas during the Apostle's second missionary journey, and accompanied him again during the third journey and was with him during both periods of captivity at Rome. An old, darkened painting of the Blessed Virgin Mary, preserved in the Basilica of St. Mary Major, in Rome, is attributed to the hand of St. Luke. He is also said to have been a physician. Cures wrought by our Saviour are always reported with much more detail in his Gospel. St. Paul writes: "Luke, the most dear physician, saluteth you." (Colossians 4:14.) Furthermore, his Gospel, more than any other, shows an intimate knowledge of the events surrounding the infancy of our Lord. Tradition maintains that he received this information directly from the Blessed Virgin. Besides the third Gospel, he also wrote the "Acts of the Apostles"—a most valuable record of the early days of the Church. An ox is the symbol of St. Luke because his Gospel opens with the story of the priesthood of Zacharias; the ox was usually the victim in the sacrifice of the Old Law offered by the priests.

4. **St. John** wrote his Gospel to defend the Divinity of Christ against the heretics. No attempt is made here to present the story of St. John since a whole chapter is devoted to him in Book II of this series. Because of his lofty reflections on the Divinity of the Word made flesh, the author of the fourth Gospel is represented as an eagle.

Points for Discussion

1. *Who were the Evangelists?*
2. *Give a brief biography of each Evangelist.*
3. *Explain the symbols by which the Evangelists are known.*



12. THE WORK OF SAINT PAUL

We discussed the conversion of St. Paul in Chapter 7. We mentioned him in our study of the Council of Jerusalem. Let us look further into his life. After he arrived at Damascus he went to the street called "Straight." There he prayed and meditated while he was physically blind. A certain man named Ananias had a revelation from our Lord to go and call upon Saul. This man entered the house where Saul was and said: "Brother Saul, the Lord hath sent me—even Jesus who appeared to thee upon thy journey hither—in order that thou mayest recover thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 9:17.)

Immediately St. Paul was able to see and was baptized.

Imagine the amazement of the Jews at hearing that Saul, their greatest champion and the most ferocious enemy of Christ, should suddenly become a Christian. Consequently, their anger was enkindled and they began to lay plans to put him to death. But the Christians helped Saul escape, letting him down over the wall in a basket.

Accompanied by Barnabas, Saul then went to Jerusalem where he met the Apostles. It was natural that they should be somewhat wary of this new convert. But when Barnabas assured them that Saul was absolutely sincere, and that he had seen the risen Christ, they were glad to welcome him into the Apostleship. This is an interesting observation.

To have seen the risen Saviour with bodily eyes was considered necessary to qualify as an Apostle. When candidates for the Apostleship were nominated, (recall that Matthias was chosen to replace Judas) Peter had said: "Of these one must become a witness with us of the Resurrection." (Acts 1:22.) Later Paul himself defends his title, "Am I not an Apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (I Cor. 9:1.)

Once converted, Paul was an indefatigable preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He earned his living by the work of his hands, undertook three missionary journeys, preached to all classes of men, spoke before King Agrippa as he did to the poorest of the poor. Here we see him addressing the Athenians.

Before preaching in the city of Athens, St. Paul walked about and observed that the parks and avenues were filled with pagan idols. He approached people on the streets and in the market place and told them of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Athenians were in a state of confusion because of their various philosophical schools. Anxious to hear Paul speak, they brought him to the Areopagus, saying: "Thou bringest some strange things to our ears; we wish therefore to know what these things mean." (Acts 17:20.)

Paul accepted the invitation. Worldly wisdom prompts men who wish to win friends to notice or praise the possessions of their hosts. St. Paul praised the Athenians for being so religious. He had seen their statues, and among them an altar with the inscription, "To the Unknown God." Afraid that they might forget some god, and so incur his wrath, they had thus dedicated it. This furnished an excellent introduction for St. Paul. He said that he had come expressly to talk about that God. He gave a beautiful discourse and when he finished, they were courteous enough, saying: "We shall hear thee about this again." But few people were converted. God must give the first grace. Paul had been brought up to hate Christ, but Christ let the ray of His grace strike him and Paul became the "vessel of election." The Athenians were kind and courteous, they heard an eloquent discourse, yet the grace of God was not given to them.

Today, we note the same thing. Some men live well but are not prosperous. Others live wickedly in prosperity and have the grace of a deathbed conversion. Why? That is all part of the beautiful pattern of salvation locked in the mind of God. When we reach eternal bliss we shall begin to understand.

Points for Discussion

1. *What is a necessary qualification for the title of Apostle?*
2. *How did St. Paul begin his work among the Athenians?*
3. *How did he show himself to be a clever ora'tor?*
4. *Compare the conversion of St. Paul and of the Athenians.*



**This book is bound in blue to honor the
Blessed Virgin Mary who continues today,
even as in the days of the Apostles, to
bestow her loving care upon the Church.**