

## Acts 5:12, 17-32

<sup>12</sup>Many signs and wonders were done among the people through the hands of the apostles. With one mind, they all continued meeting in Solomon's Colonnade.

<sup>17</sup>The high priest rose up, along with his associates (that is, the party of the Sadducees), because they were filled with envy. <sup>18</sup>They arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. <sup>19</sup>But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the prison, brought them out, and said, <sup>20</sup>"Go, stand in the temple and keep on telling the people the whole message about this life." <sup>21</sup>After they heard this, they entered the temple courts at daybreak and began to teach.

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin (that is, the whole council of elders of the people of Israel). Then they sent orders to the jail to have the apostles brought in. <sup>22</sup>But when the officers arrived, they did not find them in the prison. They returned and reported, <sup>23</sup>"We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them, we found no one inside!" <sup>24</sup>When the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests heard these words, they were puzzled about them, wondering what could have happened.

<sup>25</sup>Then someone came and reported to them, "Look! The men you put in prison are standing in the temple courts and teaching the people."

<sup>26</sup>Then the captain went with the officers and brought the apostles in without force, because they were afraid that the people might stone them. <sup>27</sup>After they brought them in, they had them stand before the Sanhedrin. The high priest asked them, <sup>28</sup>"Did we not give you strict orders not to teach in this name? Look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you are determined to bring this man's blood down on us!"

<sup>29</sup>But Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than men. <sup>30</sup>The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you arrested and killed by hanging him on a cross. <sup>31</sup>God exalted him to his right hand as Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and the forgiveness of sins. <sup>32</sup>We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

## Miracles

### I.

They had seen miracles. All of them had witnessed miracles. Jesus had turned water into wine. He had healed so many people. He had walked on water to bring them comfort in the middle of a lake in a storm. He had fed thousands with just a picnic lunch—twice. They had even witnessed him raising people from the dead.

They had seen all these things firsthand, yet you heard what they were like on that first Easter Sunday evening in today's Gospel. By that time some of them had even seen Jesus alive, the greatest miracle of all time, but they were skeptical about it. Ten of them huddled behind locked doors to talk about that extraordinary event. They didn't dare meet more publically, because they were afraid of what the Jews might do to them.

Another miracle: Jesus appeared among them in that locked room to reassure them and announce peace to them. They told the remaining disciple, Thomas, who hadn't been there, about what had happened. His skepticism was even greater. He wanted proof. Another miracle took place the next Sunday—Jesus appeared to them all again in the same locked room and gave Thomas the proof he wanted. "Put your finger here and look at my hands. Take your hand and put it into my side. Do not continue to doubt, but believe" (John 20:27, EHV).

Thomas was the doubter, but not really. *All* of them had their doubts. They all needed to learn the truth about Jesus' resurrection. They *all* needed to get prepared to proclaim the greatest miracle ever to the world.

### II.

If you know your early church history, the miracles kept coming. Jesus promised them a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, the 50<sup>th</sup> day of Easter, that special

outpouring happened. Thousands of people believed the message proclaimed by Peter and the other Apostles on that day.

But the miracles didn't stop. Today's First Reading began: "Many signs and wonders were done among the people through the hands of the apostles. With one mind, they all continued meeting in Solomon's Colonnade" (Acts 5:12, EHV). The apostles were given power by the Holy Spirit to do miracles. There was no New Testament, so those miracles served—at least in part—to demonstrate to people that these men really *had* been commissioned by Jesus to spread his message to others.

They "continued" to meet at the place called "Solomon's Colonnade." Once before this in the book of Acts Solomon's Colonnade was mentioned. It seems to have become a popular place for the early Christian church to meet. It was right by the Court of the Gentiles at the temple complex. This gave the apostles a place to teach people of all different ethnicities about Jesus. Miracles continued there. The verses between the parts of our text tell us about such miracles. People were healed even when just Peter's *shadow* fell on them. But the most important miracle recorded reports: "More and more believers in the Lord were added to their group, large numbers of both men and women" (Acts 5:14, EHV). The Lord of the Church used his apostles in a miraculous way there at Solomon's Colonnade to gather more and more believers.

The miracles didn't go unnoticed, but not in a good way—humanly speaking. "The high priest rose up, along with his associates (that is, the party of the Sadducees), because they were filled with envy. <sup>18</sup>They arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison" (Acts 5:17-18, EHV). From the perspective of the Jewish establishment religion, what was happening there at Solomon's Colonnade was disturbing. The apostles had to be thrown in jail. And for what? For doing miracles. Their miracles brought out envy and jealousy in the Jewish religious establishment.

### III.

Perhaps when we read this lesson earlier, the next miracle was the only miracle that jumped out at you. "During the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the prison, [and] brought them out" (Acts 5:19, EHV).

That certainly *is* a miracle. Especially when you consider what happened when the high priest, the Sanhedrin, and all the elders, sent their orders to have the apostles brought from the jail. "But when the officers arrived, they did not find them in the prison. They returned and reported, <sup>23</sup>"We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them, we found no one inside!" (Acts 5:22-23, EHV). Not only did the angel of the Lord come and get the apostles, he did so in such a way that no one at the prison was aware that anything had happened. The guards were still there; the doors were still locked securely. "When the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests heard these words, they were puzzled about them, wondering what could have happened" (Acts 5:24, EHV). People *always* want to find out what happened when there is a prison break.

It is at this point of today's reading that you find the most miraculous thing of all. It isn't really mentioned as a miracle, it's just a transitional passage: "Then someone came and reported to them, 'Look! The men you put in prison are standing in the temple courts and teaching the people'" (Acts 5:25, EHV). Today's Gospel hadn't happened all *that* long before this event at the public jail. "That night the Apostles met in fear," says today's hymn of the day we sang earlier. That's what they did Easter Sunday evening, and even the next week, when Thomas was there. They were afraid.

At Pentecost, the fearful men from Easter Sunday were fearful no longer. *Now* look at them, a few days or weeks *after* Pentecost. Not only are they not fearful, they aren't willing to let *anything* stop them—not even a stint in the local jail. To be sure, the angel *told* them to get out and preach, as they had been before, but the miracle is that they were absolutely fearless in doing so.

"Then the captain went with the officers and brought the apostles in without force, because they were afraid that the people might stone them" (Acts 5:26, EHV). Yet another miracle. The miracles the apostles had been doing, combined with the instruction they were giving there in Solomon's

Colonnade, had given them so much good will among the people that no one wanted to be seen as strong-arming them.

“Did we not give you strict orders not to teach in this name? Look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you are determined to bring this man’s blood down on us!” (Acts 5:28, EHV). Evidence of yet another miracle. Think about it; the chief priest, the Sanhedrin, and the elders, had apparently given this order already before the apostles were thrown into jail. Fearlessly, the formerly fearful had already defied authority, because what they now knew about Jesus was so vitally important.

“But Peter and the apostles replied, ‘We must obey God rather than men’” (Acts 5:29, EHV). Yet another miracle. Standing right there, essentially on trial for speaking outside the proscribed and approved narrative, the apostles replied in defiance yet again.

Luke is the one who wrote the Book of Acts. He was also the gospel writer who recorded these words of Jesus: “They will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, handing you over to synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for my name’s sake. <sup>13</sup>It will turn out to be your opportunity to testify” (Luke 21:12-13, EHV). Here, before powerful church authorities, Jesus’ words must have rung in the minds of the apostles.

There wasn’t even a moment’s hesitation on the part of Peter or the others. Another miracle takes place when they say: “The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you arrested and killed by hanging him on a cross. <sup>31</sup>God exalted him to his right hand as Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and the forgiveness of sins. <sup>32</sup>We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him” (Acts 5:30-32, EHV).

#### IV.

You know, today’s readings cover a large span of time. The Gospel reported events of Easter Sunday and the following week. This First Reading talked about some of the days and weeks after Pentecost. Today’s Second Reading was written by the Apostle John, who was: “...was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony about Jesus” (Revelation 1:9, EHV).

John’s imprisonment had come about half a century after the events of Acts in our First Reading. Things hadn’t changed much, in one sense. He was in prison yet again because he refused to quit teaching people about Jesus, and the salvation he won for all people on the cross.

The fears of the disciples who had met Easter Sunday behind locked doors had been realized. John was the only one of the Apostles left alive. Many of those John had called his friends, the fellow proclaimers of the gospel of Jesus Christ, had met violent deaths because of their work to spread the Good News about Jesus.

In light of all the persecution of Jesus’ disciples—not only those called the Apostles, but all of them—was indeed a miracle. The message had gone out, far and wide. Paul had been added to their number—Paul, who had been a persecutor of the Church—he had become a staunch defender of the Gospel. Yet another miracle in a long line of miracles.

Here we are, gathered together nearly 2,000 years after the events of our First Reading, and after John wrote his Revelation while in prison on the island of Patmos. The miracles continue. You keep coming to hear about what Jesus has done, despite all the attacks of the world on Christianity. Despite centuries of people distorting the Word of God and dismissing the truths about Jesus, the gospel continues to be proclaimed. It’s a miracle.

People all over the world continue to gather in their versions of Solomon’s Colonnade regularly to be strengthened and encouraged by the Words and works of Jesus. The miracle is that *you* continue to share that precious message with others. Amen.