

Thanks to God for These Five Understandings. (Acts 5:12,17-32)

* Friends, if you've ever preached to a large group of loyal listeners, you might feel yourself like a fish out of water; but if you preached Jesus to a large group of atheists, you might feel yourself like a fish on a frying-pan. Now imagine yourselves in place of me. You had to go and speak in support of a large number of Russian veterans who got together. The veterans demanded material assistance from the State and they demanded your sympathy. On that day you arrived a little later, when the meeting was under way. To your surprise, all seats in the hall were taken, and that might scare you. Soon a chairman welcomed you as you came forward. At the beginning, while you kept talking about Jesus' cross for the transgressions of many, your listeners seemed friendly, until you switched to another subject. *Dear veterans, you said, share your 'shares' with a widow, give your hand to a poor.* As soon as this idea was understood, the listeners turned into a shouting crowd. If there are two or three speaking at the same time when you are preaching, it is hard to bear; but if there are two hundred yelling, blowing whistles and grumbling, could you stand that?

* Friends, two weeks ago, instead of "Hosanna to the Son of David" you heard, "Crucify him, crucify him!" I guess some of you were not happy because your preference was to see Jesus riding on a donkey which you thought greater than seeing Jesus on the cross. With the purpose to reduce your criticism I said, *it is not Jesus' kingship shaped the apostolic message (kerugma), but it was Jesus' suffering on the cross for our transgressions.* Today I stress this point again, the passion of the cross is really the essential message as well as the following one, - Jesus' resurrection. The Resurrection is the second essential part of the kerugma and is part of the whole, (Act 2:32; 3:26; 4:10 ...). Next to the Resurrection is Jesus' exaltation as a King and Saviour, but on this 2nd Sunday of Easter we will continue to hear the joyful and powerful message from the apostles who were *giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, ... (Act 4:33).*

* Thinking of the readings for today, I decided to focus on (Acts 5:12,17-32) instead of (John 20:19-31). Although both readings match perfectly the theme of a day but I chose to preach from Acts because the John's account was preached last year. Now being determined with the lesson and the text, let's pray to the Lord.

* O Lord, God, heavenly Father, we give You thanks that of your great goodness and mercy You allowed Your only-begotten Son to redeem us from sin and everlasting death. And thereby we ask You, enlighten our hearts and minds by Your Word and the Holy Spirit that we may understand the significance of Your Son's resurrection for us, so that being taught we may be strengthened in hope always giving to You thanks for Your steadfast love, for Your grace and for the salvation in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

* When I read Acts 5, I noted an important thing, although it might seem insignificant. Here I mean the little conjunction "And." It links our text (vv. 12-32) with the previous one (vv. 1-11) texts as it would be joined two simple sentences within a compound sentence. The conjunction "And" links the miraculous signs that happened through the hands of the apostles with another miraculous sign that also happened through the apostle Peter. We must take this sign into consideration due to its significance; as the Scripture says, that sign terrified all the church people (v.11), *and great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.*

* In short, there were two people, Ananias and his wife Sapphira, in the church. They decided to follow after the rich who sold their estates and brought the money to the apostles' feet in order to assist the poor brothers. But this couple didn't want to donate their total income; on the other hand, they wanted to be seen as self-sacrificing persons in order to be praised by the brothers and receive the eternal bliss from God. They were permitted to bring so much money as they liked it, but the Holy Spirit didn't allow them to lie to Peter. Their sinful plan was exposed and they fell down dead. Now, ask yourselves, Will those two people come alive to the resurrection of life, or to the resurrection of judgment? If you are not sure, read (Joh 5:29). In view of the church's belief regarding the two kinds of resurrections and the occurrence of death of the two hypocrites, we come in understanding the genuine reason for the great awe and terror among the church people. Thanks be to God for this understanding!

* Thinking more about Ananias and Sapphira's account someone may say, What a pity ... , but this judgment helps us realize how seriously God regards sin in the church. I remember one casualty, it happened with a man

of high rank. That official refused free program offered by some Christians, even though it looked a very good deal. He said that this program would not benefit people who had been under his supervision; but it was not a truth, he had known that is a lie. Significantly, on the third day that man was carried to a cemetery. He was not a Christian, but he had told a lie to the Christian. Somebody thinks that it might have happened by chance; somebody finds a reason. By the way, I was seized with fear and awe. Thanks be to God for that understanding!

* Reflecting back to the miracles that were followed after experiencing great fear, we met the religious officials who neglected the signs God performed through the apostles, (v.17,18). We read that the chief priest Annas and other Sadducees in high rank were extremely jealous. They were determined to stop the preaching of Jesus' resurrection, (Act 4:1,2). They ordered the temple custody to put the apostles in prison. Friends, have you ever thought that an imprisonment itself can be seen as a hint of the natural death. As death separates a man from the community or beloved ones, in a similar way an imprisonment does. Death terminates a man's activities, businesses and so forth, same as an imprisonment does. The holding of the apostles in a jail can be seen as their end. The evil murdered the Teacher at first, and then they plotted against his disciples. But on the third day the Messiah arose from a tomb by the power of God and on the first night the apostles got out from jail by the act of an Angel of the Lord, (v.19). Friends, let me tell you a secret, that messenger looked pretty much like Jesus, if seeing him from afar! That Angel said, be not afraid, go and speak to the people about their guilt so that they may repent and be saved. After deliverance from likeness of death the apostles came to a richer point of knowledge that caused Jesus' resurrection. Thanks be to God for that understanding!

* But despite the common rage and knocking of knees, the apostles stood for Jesus, face to face with the virulent opposition. They spoke boldly as they were told, *The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree, (v.30), they said. Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene whom you crucified ..., (Act 4:10), they said. Therefore, let all the*

house of Israel know beyond a doubt that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ, (Act 2:36). *And when they* (the virulent opposition) *- heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them* (the apostles), (Act 5:33). Significantly, all of what they did or preached was nothing less than the power of Christ's resurrection working through the apostles, (Act 4:13)! Thanks be to God for that understanding!

* Friends, if we are rooted in the knowledge of Christ's resurrection and have experienced the presence and power of his Holy Spirit in our lives, then we'll also have the confidence to speak out that truth to even 200 atheists. Thanks be to God for that understanding!

Beloved, let Christ's resurrection shine among us with an ever living hope and with great joy. Peace and grace to you from the Father who raised Jesus from the dead.

Amen.