Acts

Questions for Personal Reflection or Small Group Study

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Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture

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# Acts 1:1–11

1. Jesus enjoined the apostles to “wait for the promise of the Father” (1:4). Why was it important for them to wait on the Spirit? What did the disciples do while waiting? (See 1:14.) What might the Lord have been doing within them during this time?

2. Has there been an occasion when you have done something on your own without waiting for God’s timing? What was the result? On the other hand, when have you waited on God’s timing, and what was the result?

3. What do you think it means to be “baptized with the Holy Spirit”? (See 1:5.)

4. Jesus’ commission to the apostles in Acts 1:8—to spread the gospel beginning close at home, then to places a little farther away, and finally to the ends of the earth—is a commission meant for every Christian in their own settings. What is the first area where you are called to speak about Jesus? To whom does the second area extend? And the last? Does the last have a boundary?

5. Just as Jesus handed on spiritual authority to his followers as they watched him ascend into heaven, so we have been “commissioned” to carry the gospel to others—especially through our baptism and confirmation. How faithful or unfaithful have you been to this commission, and how can you see yourself improving in it?

# Acts 1:12–26

1. Luke often highlights the unity of the early disciples (see 1:14). From your own experience, why is unity in the body of Christ important? What kinds of damage can occur where there is disunity?

2. The quality of our prayer is often related to the amount of time we give to it. What does the apostles’ persistence in prayer and its fruitfulness at Pentecost teach you about your own prayer life?

3. Why was Mary’s presence in the upper room important? What effect do you think her presence had on the other disciples?

4. Both Judas and Peter were unfaithful to Christ during his passion. What difference was there in their responses after this failure? What does this reveal about free will? What does it reveal about repentance and forgiveness?

# Acts 2

1. In what ways was the Holy Spirit’s descent at Pentecost similar to or different from the manifestation of God on Mount Sinai (Exod 19)?

2. Take some time in prayer to imagine yourself as one of the people in the crowd who gathered outside the upper room (2:5). What do you see? What do you hear? What is the experience like? What is your response?

3. Can you relate to the Holy Spirit as a Person? What is his primary role in your life? How would you like your relationship with him to be different?

4. Have you ever experienced being “filled with the Holy Spirit”? Have you witnessed the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in your life or in someone else’s life?

5. What do you find most striking or illuminating in Peter’s Pentecost speech?

6. What are the four main characteristics of the life of the Church, according to Acts 2:42? How have you experienced these?

# Acts 3:1–4:4

1. What part of the story of the healing of the crippled beggar speaks to your heart?

2. Have you ever experienced or witnessed a miraculous healing? What was it like?

3. Describe a time when you sensed the Lord calling you to step out in faith. How did you respond? What was the result?

4. What is the relationship between evangelization and signs and wonders? How important are signs and wonders for evangelization today?

5. The evangelistic mission of the church is not a human exercise but a divine one. Everyone has a part to play. How do you believe God is calling you to take part?

6. In Acts 4 the infant church experiences hostility to the gospel for the first time. What forms of hostility to the gospel are there in our contemporary culture? Have you been personally affected by this?

# Acts 4:5–31

1. Peter declares that Christ is the sole means of salvation for the human race (4:12). Have you ever thought about this? Are there ways that it challenges your thinking?

2. The Sanhedrin recognized that Peter and John had “been with Jesus” (4:13, literal translation). What does it mean to be with Jesus? Have you noticed a difference in your life when you spend time with Jesus?

3. Why did the church in Acts 4 need a fresh outpouring of the Spirit? Do you see a need for a fresh outpouring of the Spirit in the Church today? Please explain.

4. The early Christians continued to speak out boldly about Jesus, even after they had been forbidden to do so by the Sanhedrin. Have you ever been in a situation where witnessing to Christ could have gotten you in trouble? What happened?

# Acts 4:32–5:11

1. Why is care for the needy an essential part of the life of the Church? In what ways do you participate in the church’s care for the needy? Is the Lord calling you to do more?

2. What do you think was motivating Ananias and Sapphira to be deceitful, pretending to give all their proceeds to the church?

3. What are some examples of actions that externally seem to be good and commendable but are discolored by hidden ulterior motives? How can we purify our motives so that the Lord alone is the reason we do the good we are called to do?

4. What is “fear of the Lord”? How is it different from terror or servile fear? Do you see fear of the Lord manifested in your life?

# Acts 5:12–42

1. The zeal of Peter and John landed them in prison, but their stay was nothing more than a speed bump in their mission, for an angel soon set them free to go back to proclaiming the good news about Jesus. Have you ever felt as if you hit a wall in your efforts to serve the Lord? How did you respond?

2. Peter says that he and the apostles “must obey God rather than men” (5:29). Have you ever been in a situation where you had to make a choice either to resist a law that is contrary to the moral order or to violate your conscience? What happened?

3. Gamaliel reminds the Sanhedrin of some false messiahs who came to nothing (5:36–37). What are some examples of false prophets and false messiahs in our culture today? Why are people drawn to them?

# Acts 6

1. Differences of opinion and perceived injustices can lead to divisiveness, which destroys community. How can the apostles’ handling of the distribution complaints serve as an example for us, to help prevent splits in families or parishes or any place where Christians are together?

2. Are you aware of any situation where there is tension or division among Christians? How can you be a peacemaker?

3. How do the apostles describe their primary ministry (6:2, 4)? How is this continued by priests and bishops today?

4. What were the primary qualities looked for in those appointed to be deacons (6:3)? How can you foster those qualities in yourself?

5. How can Steven be a model for all of us? What strikes you in particular about this great man of God?

# Acts 7:1–53

1. St. Luke wants his readers to see how Stephen’s life is a mirror of Christ’s. Why does he make this parallel? What parallels can you draw between your life and the life of Jesus?

2. One of Stephen’s arguments is that the prophets were always rejected, which was a sign of the people’s rejection of God. What is at the root of that rejection? In what ways are we tempted to reject God’s messengers today?

3. In Jesus’ time, the temple had become more important to some people than the God who was worshiped there. Even holy things can become idols if we attribute undue importance to them. What kinds of things in the church today can be turned into idols that have nothing to do with the true worship of God?

# Acts 7:54–8:40

1. The persecution that broke out after Stephen’s martyrdom was an apparent setback for the Church, yet it led to the further spread of the gospel (8:1). Have you ever had any setbacks that God redirected to a good end in his loving providence?

2. The occult is a dangerous allurement for those who are not anchored in Christ (8:9–11). Even some good Catholics are not aware of the danger in horoscopes, fortune-tellers, and mediums. What can we do to spread the knowledge of the deceit and danger hidden in these supposedly innocent entertainments?

3. What do you think Simon “saw” (8:18) when the Holy Spirit fell on the new believers in Samaria? What does this reveal about the power of the Holy Spirit?

4. How would you like the Spirit to change your life? Which of his gifts would you like to receive, and what are some hindrances that may need to be removed first?

5. Philip followed the promptings of the Holy Spirit (8:26, 29). Sometimes those promptings are very quiet. Have you ever sensed the Holy Spirit prompting you to do something, especially in regard to evangelization? What was the result?

6. What were some key elements of Philip’s method of sharing the good news of Christ with the Ethiopian eunuch? What can we learn from it?

# Acts 9:1–22

1. How do you think Paul felt when he encountered the Lord Jesus and realized that he had been drastically wrong, persecuting the Lord rather than a band of heretics? What might have been going on in his mind during his three days of darkness?

2. Paul’s life was turned upside-down by his encounter with Jesus. The honesty and deep conviction with which he accepted his humiliation was the catalyst for accepting the grace of God in his life. Have you ever been deeply humbled and then, through it, become a stronger—and less cocky—person?

3. Paul had been present and perhaps played a leading role in the martyrdom of St. Stephen. How might that experience be related to his conversion on the road to Damascus?

4. Have you ever had a dialogue in which you argued with the Lord, as Ananias did in Acts 9:10–16? What was the outcome?

# Acts 9:23–43

1. Barnabas means “son of encouragement.” How was Barnabas an encouragement to Saul/Paul when the other disciples wanted to keep their distance from him (9:26–27)? Is there someone who has played this role in your life? How are you called to be an encouragement for others?

2. Imagine being a witness to the healing of Aeneas. What might it be like to see a man who had been bedridden for eight years rise up, fully healed? How would you respond?

3. Behind all the supernatural events in the early church is the work of the Holy Spirit. In every case, it is a person’s response to the promptings of the Spirit that allows God’s kingdom to spread. How has the Holy Spirit been active in your heartas you walk with the early church through Acts?

4. Tabitha, who made clothing for the poor (9:36, 39), is a model of one who uses her talents to care for those in need. What are some ways you use your gifts to care for the less fortunate? Is the Lord calling you to do so in a new way?

# Acts 10:1–11:18

1. Cornelius received a vision of the angel while he was in the midst of his regular prayer. What is the importance for you of regular (daily) prayer? How can you be more faithful to a routine of prayer? What practical steps can you take to make this a priority?

2. Describe the character of Cornelius as Luke portrays him in Acts 10. What good qualities might the Lord be calling you to imitate?

3. In the Old Testament God set Israel apart to be his chosen people. In the New Testament, God breaks down the division between Jews and Gentiles and grants his grace equally to all. Has God ever broken you out of a particular way of thinking and acting that seemed good at the time but that in the end you realized was really narrow-minded?

4. Where are the dividing walls in your life? How can you, with the help of the Holy Spirit, begin to break down these walls?

5. What happened to Cornelius and his friends when the Holy Spirit fell upon them (10:44–45)? How can you stir up the gifts of the Holy Spirit that were given to you at baptism and confirmation? Do you have a desire to stir up the Spirit within you, or are you afraid of what might be asked of you if you do?

# Acts 11:19–12:24

1. The gift of prophecy enables the Christian to see the present (and sometimes the future) from God’s perspective and to exhort and encourage others by speaking God’s word (11:27; 1 Cor 14:2). It is a gift that one should desire (1 Cor 14:1). What do you think about praying for this gift? Are you open to receiving it if God wishes to grant it to you?

2. Peter was saved from his predicament at the eleventh hour. What does this tell us about the way God works? Why does he do this, when he could free us sooner without causing us anxiety? Have you ever had an eleventh-hour experience? If so, what did it teach you?

3. The church prayed for Peter’s release, but when he was freed from prison they didn’t believe it. A common human tendency is to discount the possibility of God’s supernatural intervention in everyday life. How strong is your expectancy that God really answers prayers? Are you tempted to think that maybe he answers other people’s prayers but not yours? What is the biblical answer to this temptation? (See Matt 7:7–11; Heb 4:15–16.)

# Acts 12:25–13:52

1. A common temptation is to first plan everything and then ask God’s blessing on our plans instead of letting the Holy Spirit take the lead. How does the church in Antioch provide a model for doing the opposite, seeking to know the will of God first? How can we follow that example?

2. One purpose of the laying on of hands is to ask for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon a person, especially in view of a new task or mission. It is not widely practiced today, except in some circles, and yet it is a powerful way to pray for others. Would you consider making it a part of your prayer for your family and friends?

3. The “divine reversal” is God’s way of using the evil choices of human beings to bring about his own plans (see Gen 50:20). Paul’s sermon in Antioch of Pisidia shows how this was the case with the passion of Jesus. How can we apply this principle to the situation today in which Christians in various parts of the world are suffering from terrorism and persecution?

# Acts 14

1. Being a follower of Jesus means making a decision to live for him—that is, to be his disciple no matter what the cost. Would you say that you have made that decision? Are there areas of your life that have not yet been influenced by it?

2. Paul and Barnabas had to take decisive action to avoid being venerated as gods by the people of Lystra. What are some ways we can be tempted by the desire for human approval, admiration, or acclamation? How can we combat that temptation?

3. At Lystra Paul was stoned—the most severe persecution he had endured up to that point. Have you ever suffered opposition in doing what you thought was the will of God? What is the right response in such a circumstance?

# Acts 15:1–35

1. If you had been a member of the early church in Jerusalem, which side of the debate over circumcision might you have been on? Why? What is motivating those on each side?

2. St. Peter interprets the insistence of some Jewish Christians on the need for circumcision as “putting God to the test” (15:10). How can a rigid attachment to tradition actually work against the Holy Spirit? Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you were sure you knew the will of God, only to find out later that God had another plan than the one you thought?

3. The Council of Jerusalem became a model for the way to settle important issues in the church. What can we take away from this episode that will give us a balanced understanding of how the Holy Spirit works with imperfect human beings in the Church to bring about his will?

4. How does Peter describe how we are saved (15:9, 11)? Does this challenge your usual way of thinking? In what way?

# Acts 15:36–16:15

1. Even saints can have moments that they may later regret. Paul and Barnabas might be the first to admit that their dispute over John Mark should have been handled in a way that did not lead to a split. What are some lessons you can learn from their separation due to their conflict over John Mark?

2. Paul recruited young Timothy to be his assistant and mentored him personally over many years. Why is mentoring an important part of life in the church? Do you know someone who is a good mentor for others? How can we foster mentoring in the church today?

3. On several occasions during Paul’s second missionary journey, his plans are redirected by the Holy Spirit (16:6–10). Has the Holy Spirit ever done this in your life? How can we ensure we are flexible and open to the Spirit when we make plans and as we carry them out?

4. The Lord opened Lydia’s heart to give heed to the gospel preached by Paul (16:14). What does this teach us about our own efforts to evangelize?

# Acts 16:16–40

1. Paul takes time to discern the right response to the fortune-telling girl (16:16). There is no formula for discerning what we should do in every situation, but we can try to remove distractions that keep us from hearing the Holy Spirit. For instance, we can ask, “Am I making this decision out of fear? To what extent are my own desires involved here? Which option would give greater glory to God? Would others be encouraged or discouraged? What are my motives?” Can you think of other questions that would bring clarity in discerning the will of God in a particular situation?

2. Paul and Silas’s response to being beaten, chained, and imprisoned is surprising, to say the least (16:25). Why is praising God the right response in every situation, no matter how difficult? Have you ever put this principle into practice in a tough situation? If so, what was the result?

3. Imagine being one of the other prisoners and witnessing the events of that memorable night. What impression might they make on you?

4. How does the baptism of the jailer’s household (16:31–34) provide indirect support for the practice of infant baptism?

# Acts 17

1. Paul’s reception in Athens reminds us that “itching ears” (2 Tim 4:3) is a phenomenon in every age. People often want to hear about trendy new ideas for superficial reasons. Do you see this tendency in yourself? If so, what is the remedy?

2. In Athens Paul goes right to the Areopagus, the marketplace for exchange of ideas, and proclaims Christ there. How can we follow his example in our own culture?

3. Paul begins by pointing out something he can affirm in the Athenians’ religious seeking, even though their beliefs were deeply misguided. He then steers his conversation toward knowledge of the true God (17:22–31). What can we learn from this? What are some ways that we can turn our conversations into moments of grace and witnessing?

4. Not everyone accepts the truth and grace offered to them in the gospel message (17:32). What do you think are some ingredients that turn people’s hearts to accept the gospel, and what are some hindrances that make them turn away?

# Acts 18

1. Paul worked for his living because he didn’t want to be a burden on the fledgling Christian community. At other times, he accepted financial support (Phil 4:15–18). How would you describe the importance of financially supporting those who serve the Lord in full-time ministry?

2. If Jesus spoke into your current circumstances to encourage you, as he did for Paul (18:9–10), what message might he speak to you? Think about your current relationships and circumstances. What words of encouragement have you given to others recently?

3. Timothy, Silas, Aquila and Priscilla, and Apollos were apostles working beside Paul. The Church today needs Timothys, Silases, and Priscillas, each with their unique gifts, to help build up the body of Christ, especially by working alongside pastors. What advice would you give your pastor for accomplishing this?

# Acts 19

1. If Paul were to visit a typical Catholic parish today, he might be inclined to ask the same question he posed to the disciples in Ephesus: “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” (19:2). How do you think Catholics can open ourselves more fully to the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in order to fulfill our calling to evangelize?

2. There is much power in the name of Jesus, and we are called to do “everything” in his name (Col 3:17). What does it mean to speak or act in the name of Jesus? Why did the sons of Sceva fail in their attempt at exorcism in the name of Jesus?

3. Occult practices were highly popular in first-century Ephesus, as they are in many areas today. What are the spiritual dangers involved in occult practices? Are there any ways you need to follow the example of the Ephesian converts in Acts 19:18–19?

4. Like pagans who worshiped rocks and statues, we sometimes break the first commandment by putting created things before God. Is there anything in your life that fascinates you to the point that it takes you away from your prayer time? Do you recognize any other false gods in your life?

# Acts 20:1–16

1. Do you recognize the basic elements of the Mass in the account of the gathering of believers at Troas (20:7–11)? What are they?

2. Acts 20 mentions several of Paul’s less-known missionary companions, such as Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Tychicus, and Trophimus. Paul was not a lone ranger but a team player who relied on faithful coworkers in Christ. How can we apply this principle in the Church today?

3. Luke relates how the young man Eutychus falls asleep during Paul’s sermon. Are you ever distracted when listening to the Scripture readings or homily at Mass? How do you refocus yourself? Ask others in the group for ways that they have found helpful to fight off distractions.

# Acts 20:17–38

1. In Paul’s farewell to the leaders of the church in Ephesus he emphasized that he had taught them the whole, unvarnished truth of the Christian faith (20:26–27, 31), and he warned that “fierce wolves” would come and seek to lead people away from the truth. What are some ways that teachers today can be tempted to water down or distort the truths of the faith? What is the remedy?

2. “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (20:35)—these words of Jesus are recorded not in the Gospels but here in Acts. Do you feel in your life that you are more blessed when you give? Can you give examples? Was there a turning point in your life when you experienced this for the first time?

3. Luke describes warm bonds of affection between Paul and the leaders of the church in Ephesus (20:36–37). Why is brotherly/sisterly affection important among the members of the Christian community? Do you experience this in your parish? If not, how can you be part of the solution?

# Acts 21:1–26

1. Throughout Acts, Christian hospitality is a subtle but important theme. Everywhere Paul went, if there were Christians in the area he and his team were welcomed, fed, and housed (21:4–5). In what ways is Christian hospitality important today? Are there ways that you practice it or sense you are being called to do so?

2. Agabus’s prophecy that Paul would be imprisoned (21:11) was true, but the Christians’ interpretation of it—that Paul should therefore avoid going to Jerusalem—was incorrect. Can you think of other examples that show the importance of accurately interpreting a word from God?

3. The Jerusalem leaders propose a plan for fostering unity where there has been misunderstanding (21:20–25). Every Christian has a responsibility to foster the unity of the church, neither breaking away from it oneself or causing others to break away. What kind of actions or attitudes break down the unity of the church? What can you do to preserve unity and to help others to stay within the fold in a loving and faithful way?

# Acts 21:27–23:35

1. The gospel, or simply the witness of a Christian life, sometimes provokes violent opposition (21:27–32). What has most moved you about the persecution of Christians around the world today? Do you pray regularly for our persecuted brethren? Are there other ways you can support them?

2. Paul is nearing the end of his mission as he looks back and relates the major moments of his life (22:1–21). Have you reflected on the major moments in your life and how the Lord has led you to this day? Each story holds so many reasons for glorifying God. Share with the others some moment of grace for which you wish to give God thanks and praise.

3. The Lord comforted Paul by telling him not to worry, that all was going forward according to God’s plans (23:11). Have you ever been at a low point in life when it felt that everything was going wrong? How did you handle it? Did you feel that the Lord was with you?

# Acts 24:1–25:12

1. These final chapters of Acts deal a lot with Paul’s legal trials and imprisonments. Have you ever been in a legal situation that helped you to grow in your trust of the Lord? How could losing one’s physical freedom help in the journey toward inner freedom?

2. Jesus was silent during his trial before Pilate, but Paul speaks out in his own defense, pointing out the injustice of the charges against him (24:10–21). What are some reasons why it is appropriate for him to do so?

3. Without going into details, have you ever had to defend yourself against unjust accusations? What are some right and wrong ways of doing so?

# Acts 25:13–26:32

1. Over the centuries and down to our own day there have been many radical conversions, including hardened sinners who turned to the Lord and lived holy lives afterward. Are you personally familiar with any examples? What does this say about the grace of God?

2. God calls everyone to holiness, regardless of our past, and holiness can be attained by anyone who accepts God’s grace and lives by it. If you feel you are being held back, what do you think is the cause?

3. God has unconditional love even for those who hate him and do everything to undermine his kingdom. So too Paul stands up to injustice and yet he also has his enemies’ salvation at heart (26:22–29). If you were put in jail for your faith, how would you react to those who did this to you?

# Acts 27

1. Despite the fact that he is a prisoner in chains, Paul is friendly toward all those on the ship with him and seeks their welfare (27:21–26, 31–36). Can you think of ways you need to practice his attitude toward those who make life difficult for you?

2. Paul is so confident that the Lord is truly in control that he is not paralyzed with fear in the storm-tossed ship, as his shipmates are. What can we learn from Paul’s serene acceptance of the storm? Are there areas of your life where you lack trust in the Lord? What can you do to increase your confidence in him?

3. Even what seems to be a setback, if it is accepted with trust in the Lord, always ends up being for the best. Can you think of examples of this?

# Acts 28:1–16

1. The people of Malta were superstitious but full of kindness and generosity. Do you know people who are rich in natural virtues but who do not know the Lord? What do you think is needed for them to be drawn to Christ?

2. Paul arrives in Rome in a way he did not expect—not as the leader of a successful missionary team but as a prisoner awaiting trial. Have you ever experienced the Lord “changing the script” when you thought you knew his plan? How did you respond? In retrospect, do you see the Lord’s hand in it?

# Acts 28:17–31

1. *You* and *your story* are the open ending of the Acts of the Apostles. How would you like the rest of your life to be written if it were to be incorporated into a new chapter of Acts? What steps do you need to start taking now to begin this next phase of your life, a chapter that will be written in heaven for the honor and glory of God?