

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in the name of our risen Lord, Jesus Christ! The title for today's sermon is 'What God has made clean', and is taken from the First Reading, Acts chapter 11. Let us pray... Amen.

There is a bunch of stuff going on in the First Reading. Yet, there is even more when it is looked at in context of what just happened in the previous chapter in Acts, which was the full account of Peter going to a Gentile named Cornelius and his household, how Peter proclaimed the Gospel of Christ and Him crucified, and then after seeing the Holy Spirit in the people, Peter baptized the whole Gentile household. This leads to today's reading when Peter returns to Jerusalem and goes before the council there to explain his actions.

I do find it a little interesting how the circumcision party of the Jews in Jerusalem were not so upset about Peter's journey to Caesarea to see some Gentiles, his talking with those Gentiles, his preaching to those Gentiles, or even his baptizing of those Gentiles, or the fact that those Gentiles had received the Word of God, BUT that they took offense with Peter's eating with those Gentiles. Of all the possible offenses which Peter could have caused, table fellowship surely should have not have been at the forefront. Yet this is exactly what Peter did, he ate with them. Then, on top of that, Peter even stayed in the same house with these Gentiles for a couple of days. The shame. (*Shivers*) The reason for the shamefulness was the Jews considered the Gentiles unclean as a whole and wanted very little to do with them. In fact, the Jews had a term for the Gentiles, 'Goy', with translates loosely as 'heathens', or even 'dogs'.

I have a t-shirt with pictures of all kinds of animals: a sheep, cow, pig, moose, rooster, and couple of other animals. Below the animals are the words: 'There is plenty of room for all God's creatures – right next to the mashed potatoes.' Most people who see it just smile, but there is the occasional one who takes offense. When this happens I simply say it is taken from the Bible, in both Acts chapter 10 and 11.

As offensive as my shirt is to a vegan or member of PETA, Peter table fellowship with those Gentiles created an even greater offense to the Jews in the First Reading today. Peter did something so unthinkable, mainly for a devout and pious Jew; He went and ate with some unclean heathen Gentiles. A good Jewish man just wouldn't do that. To put it in perspective, it would be worse than cowboy eating his own horse.

Yet the eating together is not the central issue in the text. The reading centers on Cornelius, a Gentile, and Peter, a Jew. God gives a vision to Peter which convinces him that Gentiles are not to be considered unclean in comparison to Jews and God causes Cornelius to send for Peter. Peter preaches Christ and Him crucified to Cornelius and this preaching of the Gospel brings the Holy Spirit to all those who heard the Word (Compare Hebrews 2:4).

Peter's message to Cornelius was simple; **"we are witnesses of all that Jesus did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put Him to death by hanging Him on a tree,⁴⁰ but God raised Him on the third day and made Him to appear,⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead.⁴² And He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.⁴³ To Him all**

the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name."(Acts 10:39-43)

This is exactly what happened. Cornelius was waiting for the Messiah, and Peter had the privilege to proclaim Jesus has already come. Through the Gospel Words spoken by Peter the Holy Spirit came, created faith, forgave their sins and God made them clean.

This special gift of the Holy Spirit confirmed the truth of the Gospel. By extension, this preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles caused offense in Jerusalem and so Peter went there and defended what he had done. Peter simply followed Jesus command at His ascension: **"Go! Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."**(Matt 28:19-20)

Fortunately the Jews themselves realized what God had done. They glorified God and declared (Acts 11:18): "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life." In spite of their uncleanness, sinfulness, and unworthiness God has made them clean, forgiven, and His own children. In spite of the hardness of heart of the Jews, the Gospel message of Christ and Him crucified was able to break through.

Because why did Christ come into this world and take on our flesh, but to also take on our uncleanness, our sins, everything that we've done to separate ourselves from God? To pay for these with His own life. What was Pentecost all about? Repentance to life. And the preaching of the Gospel? Repentance to life. Why the special gifts of the Holy Spirit in the early Church? To confirm for all, of all times, that this Gospel brings with it repentance to eternal life. In this, and every time, the account centers in Christ and Him crucified.

This was the message and the salvation which came to Cornelius and his household and to all who believe, are baptized; those who God makes clean by washing their sins away with the blood of our crucified Lord and Saviour. God does this powerful and life saving act in your hearing of His Word. Paul says the same thing **"In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,"**(Eph 1:14)

This is the message, of salvation in Christ and Him crucified in your place, continues to be proclaimed to all those who are unclean, including you and I. Despite our uncleanness God has made us clean us. Despite our failure to keep the entire Law, Christ has completed it in our place and we are credited with His righteousness. Despite our unworthiness, God declared us worthy on account of Christ and His work for you.

You continue to have the privilege to hear, as the angel told Cornelius, the 'message by which you will be saved, you and all your household'(11:14), namely that God has sent His Son Jesus Christ into the flesh, Jesus carried your sins, Jesus died in your place to make you clean, and then rose on the first Easter morning proclaiming His work for you complete.

We also have the privilege and the calling to share this Word of cleansing with the world around us. We are called to share this Good News of Salvation in Christ with those who are unclean in the world around us, those who do not know God because they have never heard His Word, or those who have fallen away and no longer hear His Word. God's salvation is for all people, even those unclean, those we least like, and/or those who make us uncomfortable because God has made them clean by the blood of Christ. Jesus died for them, the same way He died for you. Christ's salvation is for them, even if those like Cornelius who are not aware of it. This salvation we have been given is a gift, one for which we could never earn. We are all saved by God's grace through faith alone, we contribute nothing to our salvation. Yes we still do good, but strictly as a response to the grace first given us.

You are saved by grace through God's gift of faith, just as Peter, Cornelius, and all who have heard God's Word and believed. Let us follow in their example by sharing the Good News of Christ and Him crucified for our salvation because you have been made clean and 'to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to *eternal* life'

Amen.

* This sermon belongs to Christ and His Church because it is taken from His Word. Please feel free to copy or use it accordingly. I expect people to copy my sermons otherwise I would not post them. I only ask that you quote accurately if you attribute anything to me. Should you decide to contact me, I would be very interested in knowing where you are. Please include the name of your city, province or state, and country when contacting me.