

SUNDAY *to* SUNDAY

FACT OF FAITH THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

by Fr. Larry Rice

For most of the year, the scripture readings at Catholic Masses follow a familiar pattern: the first reading is taken from the Old Testament, followed by a psalm, followed by a reading from a New Testament Epistle, and finally a reading from one of the four Gospels. But during the Easter season, the pattern changes. Instead of an Old Testament reading, we begin with a reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

Acts is a unique book in the New Testament. The Gospels tell the stories of the life and ministry of Jesus, and the epistles are letters circulated among the first communities of believers. But the Acts of the Apostles recounts the stories of the spread of the Christian faith from Christ's disciples in Jerusalem to most of the ancient world.

Not precisely history in the modern sense of the word, Acts was written by the evangelist Luke. Ideally, it should be read as the second half of the story told in Luke's Gospel. It shows the remarkable transformation that happens to Jesus' followers as they come to terms with the reality of his Resurrection. When they receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they gain the courage, strength, and wisdom to carry their new faith beyond the communities of their own people. This was a significant change in an ancient mindset: this new faith was not for a specific people but was to be shared with all the world.

The Acts of the Apostles recounts the heroism and struggles of those first disciples and first martyrs. In chapter two there is an idealized description of the first believers' life together, where everything is shared, and everyone prays together in perfect accord. Soon enough there are disputes, controversies, persecutions, and divisions. But through it all, God's Spirit guides the nascent Church to carry on Christ's mission in the world.

If you have an hour or two this Easter season, I recommend reading the Acts of the Apostles in one sitting. It's the best way to get a sense of the entire story. In many ways, it's still our story, as we work to carry out the same mission given to those first believers. During the fifty days of this Easter season, the Acts of the Apostles should give us hope that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide the followers of the risen Lord.

PRO-LIFE PERSPECTIVE BUILDING UP LIFE THROUGH ENCOUNTER

by Kimberly Baker

Life too often moves at a breakneck pace. Technology is always at our fingertips to help us achieve more and do more—and with greater speed. When this continuous, fast-paced lifestyle overwhelms us, we risk losing our human touch with others. In contrast, Pope Francis often speaks of creating a “culture of encounter,” which not only transforms the way we live in the world but also beautifully affirms and facilitates a culture of life:



To be called by Jesus, to be called to evangelize, and third: to be called to promote the culture of encounter. In many places . . . the culture of exclusion, of rejection, is spreading. There is no place for the elderly or for the unwanted child; there is no time for that poor person in the street. At times, it seems that for some people, human relations are regulated by two modern “dogmas”: efficiency and pragmatism.... Have the courage to go against the tide of this culture of efficiency, this culture of waste. (*World Youth Day Homily*, July 27, 2013)

In both our work and personal lives, we can promote a culture of encounter. Rather than reducing our interactions to rushed necessities, how would we bring life to our corner of the world if we risked being fully present to others? In doing so, we discover the gifts of others and bring out the best in them, drawing them closer to God's love through such experiences.

A culture of encounter builds up a culture of life because it acknowledges the dignity of each person. Unlike the “dogmas” of efficiency and pragmatism, which disregard people who are weaker, slower, or in need, authentic encounters have a positive twofold effect: we discover more deeply the priceless value of another, and we strengthen our own ability to love.

SAINT OF THE WEEK MARK THE EVANGELIST

*First Century
Feast—April 25*

According to the Acts of the Apostles, Mark's mother owned the house where the first Jerusalem Christians prayed and where Peter stayed after his miraculous release from prison (Acts 12:1-19). The New Testament also notes that Mark traveled with Paul and Barnabas on their mission to Antioch and that he was associated with both Paul and Peter in Rome. He may have written his Gospel, based on Peter's preaching, in Rome. By tradition, he was the martyred bishop of Alexandria, Egypt, with his relics later carried to Venice by Venetian merchants. In Christian tradition and art, he is often represented by the image of a lion.

