

Sermon: 6th Sunday of Easter (Mother's Day)

Text: Acts 10:34-48 (vv. 42, 43)

Theme: A Great Day for the Family

Goal: Jesus wants the entire family united in the same faith

Dear Friends, Dear Mothers,

Introduction: A mother is never a mother alone: She has always her child/children, and, in regular basis, she has her husband and her family. This makes Mother's Day not just a day to honour the mothers, but a day to think about the family and the important role a mother plays in the family. As a Christian Church, we have to enlarge our vision and look at the role that a Christian mother plays in her family. She can guide the children and the entire family on the right path of God's will; or she can disperse them if she is not faithful to the Christian belief. – I know that there are other issues that interfere with the life of the children, even in the best Christian education. But the Christian mother is always there like a secure harbour, praying for her children and ready to receive them back with love.

Our text shows Peter preaching to a family in a home. The mother is not mentioned specifically; but we can assume that she was there too, as the entire family was called together when Peter arrived, and even "some relatives and close friends" (Acts 10:24).

I - The background

The Book of Acts shows how the missionary promise of Jesus was accomplished: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1.8). Jerusalem received the message of the resurrected Christ in a very strong way on Pentecost day, when Peter preached and almost 3,000 people

confessed their faith in Jesus and were baptized (Acts 2). Samaria received the Gospel first through Philip, and then through Peter and John (Acts 8). “The end of the earth” began to be reached when the eunuch of Ethiopia received the Gospel and was baptized, taking the Good News to his country, as we heard last Sunday (Acts 8). Now the Romans are on the line to receive the Gospel (Acts 10). – We have to be aware that it was not easy for the first apostles, who were Jews, to reach people from other nationalities, to enter their houses and to eat with them, due to all food restrictions (Kosher food) and purification ceremonies the Jewish people had and still have.

Cornelius was a Roman Centurion, in charge to maintain order in the conquered land of Israel, as many other Centurions. Some of them were well impressed by the Jewish way of life and moral laws, especially impressed by the family system the Jews used to practice according to the Ten Commandments. Some of them were acknowledged as “righteous and God-fearing men, and they were respected by the Jewish people” (v.22). The Gospel tells us about the Centurion of Capernaum, whose servant was healed by Jesus (Luke 7). Cornelius was among these “God-fearing men”.

Peter and Cornelius received a vision at the same time. While Cornelius was praying, he saw an angel that told him to call Peter to his house. Peter as well, during his praying time, had a vision showing him not to despise anyone, because God wants to reach all. So, Cornelius sent one of his devout soldiers and two servants to look for Peter. When they found Peter, he went with them. In spite of all the Jewish traditions and laws, Peter and his companions entered the house of Cornelius. Many people were gathered there, waiting for Peter. As soon as they were introduced to each other and Cornelius told Peter why he had called the Apostle, Peter began to preach:

II – The message

First, he stated a change in his way of judging people : “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.” – It was very important for Peter to say this, because the Romans knew how strict the Jews were, not mixing themselves with other races.

Second, Peter went straight to the point and announced the heart of the Gospel, “the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.” Cornelius and the others had heard about the Nazarene who was crucified in Jerusalem and about the rumours of His resurrection. Now Peter summarized Jesus’ ministry from His baptism and his healing ministry through Galilee, to His crucifixion and resurrection in Jerusalem. Peter said: “We are witnesses... we saw him... we ate and drank with Him after he rose from the dead”.

Third, Peter linked all what happened with Jesus to the prophecies of the Old Testament and announced that “everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name”. – The message of forgiveness frees us from all condemnation and releases us from the fear of judgment, because we are declared blameless and not-guilty on behalf of Jesus. Faith in Jesus gives a new life and fills us with joy and hope! And this is just what happened to Peter’s audience at the house of Cornelius:

III – The result

“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.” Peter’s companions were astonished as they saw what was happening! It was a new Pentecost, now among the Gentiles! And they all were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ! – Peter stayed some more days with them to strengthen their faith and knowledge.

We can assume that the whole household of Cornelius was listening to Peter's sermon and was blessed with the Holy Spirit and was baptized. This means: His family (wife and children), some friends and relatives (Acts 10:24), some of his soldiers and servants (Acts 10:7)... "Household" had a broader sense than "extended family" in the African tradition. And this brings us back to our family as we are celebrating Mother's Day.

Conclusion: We and our beloved ones were also baptized and received the Holy Spirit. It is the parent's duty to bring their children to the Holy Baptism and to teach them the Bible truths, living a life guided by the Holy Spirit in the family. Even so, we know by experience that not all our beloved ones remained faithful to our Saviour Jesus. But we shall not give up. Mother's and father's prayers are powerful! - I just received a testimony of a good friend of mine. Her son had been a faithful Christian, till he moved to Canada in 1996 to do his master's degree. He began to doubt the Bible truths. Then he married an atheist girl. The two children they had were not baptized. The mother didn't stop praying for them. Last year the son came to his senses and realized how stupid he had been. He looked for the help of a pastor, was forgiven and returned to his Christian faith. But his atheist wife said to him: Either your God, or me... and they divorced. The guy is suffering because of his family, but he is in peace with God again through faith in Jesus Christ. – The mother is now praying for the former daughter-in-law and for the two grandchildren. May God hear her. – Each of us has several different challenges in our family lives. But let us always look for the truth that comes from God through our Lord Jesus Christ. He will guide us to the true joy that only the resurrected Jesus can give us. Amen.