

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Verses & Notes February 21, 2007

Acts 19:1-7

1: While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples.

2: And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

3: And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism."

4: And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus."

5: On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

6: And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.

7: There were about twelve of them in all.

Introduction:

- Never before in the history of the world have more people been able to hear the truth about salvation in Jesus Christ and His Church. God has blessed us with the gifts of technology and communication: books, television, radio, satellites, Internet, cds, dvds, movies, and the list goes on. These all have a divine purpose, but we also all know that these gifts have too often been used for purposes contrary to the Gospel. As a result, it can also be said that never in the history of the world have more people been able to hear inaccurate, incomplete, and false representations of the Gospel. This is part of what we'll be discussing today on **Deep In Scripture**.

- Expound on opening comment ...
- **Preparing for our study of Ephesians:**
 - Looking at the background in the book of Acts to understand why Paul wrote this letter to the believers in and around Ephesus.
 - Several weeks ago, we looked briefly at three things from Acts chapters 18-19, that illustrate stages in spiritual formation ...

I: What was Ephesus like before the Gospel? (19:23-29, 33-35)

- Ancient pagan city, renowned for its great temple of Artemis;
- Though there were Jews in the city & a synagogue, they were not in favor.
- *Like these pagans, many of us have spiritual beginnings that were dramatically different or even antagonistic to our Christian faith.*
 - *Many of us were baptized as children but then poorly formed;*
 - *Many of us were pagans before we heard the Gospel.*
 - *In both cases, it's possible that some of this false baggage remains uncorrected.*

II: Paul's First Visit to Ephesus: (18-21)

- Paul finishing up his 2nd missionary journey, 1st after the Jerusalem council;
- After separating from Aquila & Priscilla, he stopped to preach, as was his custom in the synagogue, where he "argued" with the Jews; though they asked him to stay, he declined!

- *In our own lives, occasional seeds are planted that do not initially take root.*

III: An Inadequate Witness: Apollos (24-28)

- Soon after Paul leaves, an unknown young evangelist arrives from Alexandria named Apollos;
 - He is described as eloquent, well versed in the Scriptures (OT), fervent in spirit, and instructed in the way of the Lord;
 - Problem was, "*he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John.*"
 - He had an accurate yet inadequate formation;
 - And he was passing this along!
 - Apollos also spoke in the *synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and expounded to him the way of God more accurately.*
 - No mention of problems with Jews in synagogue, so maybe what he had been taught & was teaching was watered down enough not to make waves;
 - Aquila & Priscilla took him aside & corrected his formation, but he wished to move on to Corinth where he continued his preaching ministry.
 - Interesting: Aquila & Priscilla corrected Apollos, but what about those he had taught?
 - *Like the people of Ephesus, some of us have received incomplete or even inaccurate formation in our Christian faith;*
 - *some of us belonged to Christian traditions that believe & practice things that are different than traditional Catholic Christianity.*
- **What might have happened if their faith had never been corrected?
But by God's mercy, it was.**

BREAK---

1: While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples.

- St. Paul on his 3rd missionary journey ... "the upper country" ...
- "found some disciples" ... Ephesus was a large city; possibly there are loosely connected pockets of disciples who have yet to be organized;
- We are not told whether these were the disciples of Apollos.

2: And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

- Why is this the first question Paul asks?
 - Possibly not; rather his observations of their faith indicates something is lacking.
 - *When people meet us, get to know us & our faith, what might they find lacking?*
- Do you find anything curious about this question?
 - Do we receive the HS when we "**believe**"?
 - What does St. Paul mean here by "**when you believed**"?
 - *He presumes the entire process of conversion & reception into the Church, including Baptism, and we'll see this in a few lines..*

2b: And they said, "No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

- WHOA! Can you imagine being a Christian and not having heard of the Holy Spirit?
- Either they were disciples of Jews who had left Palestine after hearing only the teaching of John the Baptist,
- OR they have been inadequately taught by Apollos or someone else;
 - Sometimes teachers fail to pass on what they presume ...
 - Other times teachers are blind to their own blind spots ...
- Note: Paul's question asks whether they "heard," not whether they "received" the HS.

3: And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?"

- This indicates that for St. Paul having "believed" presumed they had been baptized;
- We need to hear St. Paul uttering a great note of bewildered dismay!
 - How could anyone be baptized apart from knowing about the HS?!
 - Sadly, this happens, to some extent, all the time:
 - Baptism is taught merely as a sign of a person's faith;
 - Or, people baptized as infants are never adequately catechized;
 - Yet still, few Christian churches completely ignore the HS, though sometimes He is inadvertently ignored!

3b: They said, "Into John's baptism."

4: And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus."

- Note how positive & charitable Paul is in confronting their ignorance;
- It's as if St. Paul was helping them connect the dots of their faith:
 - They were "disciples" & we'll assume had been taught about Jesus, possibly from Apollos; But there was a disconnect between their baptism and Jesus.
 - They probably had no idea that their faith was incomplete;
 - *Can this be true for any us of today?*
 - Some of us pay little attention to our baptisms...
 - This is why Catholics bless themselves with holy water...
 - But even more common, many Christians are blind to their inadequate, incomplete understanding of the faith.

5: On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

- They apparently, by grace, desired the fullness of faith & were baptized;
- Some Christians make an issue here abt St. Paul not using the Trinitarian formula:
 - This is nothing but misguided proof-texting, because, in the larger context of the book of Acts, the rest of Scripture, the writings of the Early Church Fathers, and the continual teaching of the Church, in her councils and tradition, Christian baptism has always been in the name of the Trinity. This is what happens when private interpretation & *sola Scriptura* are about the authority of the Church.
 - What Luke is emphasizing here is Christian baptism vs. pre-Christian baptism.

6&7: And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve of them in all.

- Here again, many Christians use this text to teach that *true* Christians, anointed by the Holy Spirit, must show visible signs of the Spirit;
- Once again, this is just misguided proof-texting, because, in the larger context of the book of Acts, the rest of Scripture, the writings of the Early Church Fathers, and the continual teaching of the Church, in her councils and tradition, Christian baptism frees us from the stain of original sin and gives us the Holy Spirit; the necessity of visible signs as evidence of the reception of the Holy Spirit required;

- **But what about speaking in tongues or prophesying?**
 - Gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12-15; CCC,2003; see *Jims' Notes*)
 - For the building up of the Body of Christ;
 - A "gift" to be received with gratitude, not overly sought: (1 Cor 12:27-31)
 - "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? **But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.**"*
 - *The Greek allows for an alternative translation of 12:31, the fits the context better: "You earnestly desire the higher gifts, but I will show you a still more excellent way."*
 - One again, the problem with *sola scriptura* & private interpretation, when the Bible can have alternate translations with contradictory meanings! This has led to dozens of separate Christians denominations with often contradictory beliefs in the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
 - Many Christians have overreacted in fear & sometimes ignorance, against those who carry their interest in charismatic gifts too far, by denying & resisting the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But as Paul emphasized in 1 Cor 15: 39-40,
 - So, my brethren, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues; but all things should be done decently and in order.*

Review the stages of the spiritual formation of these Ephesian Christians:

- Originally Pagans;
- Seeds planted by Paul but not nurtured;
- Received an accurate but incomplete catechesis from Apollos or someone else;
- Then corrected by St. Paul, a trustworthy & authoritative teacher;
- By grace, they received this correction;
- And were baptized and received the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

How does this compare with our own spiritual formations?

- Every week on the Journey Home program my guests speak of their spiritual formation & journeys into the Catholic Church.
- Myself:
 - Early years, no church;
 - Then received Lutheran teaching & baptism at age 7;
 - And Lutheran catechesis & confirmation age 13;
 - However, I essentially left the faith during college for alternative "gospels";
 - By grace & the witness of others, I experienced a re-conversion at age 21;
 - Went to seminary, was ordained, & served in pastoral ministry for 9 years;
 - THEN learned that my formation was accurate but incomplete!
 - *Sola Scriptural* & *sola fide* were unscriptural! (see chnetwork.org)
 - By grace, received into the Catholic Church at age 40!
- Jim:
 - Baptized at age 3 months, Evangelical United Brethren;
 - Sunday school & catechesis through age 16;
 - Drifted for 2 years;
 - Re-committed to Christ at age 18;
 - Lutheran catechesis & confirmed at age 19;
 - Began at age 22 to realize that my formation was incomplete;
 - Entered seminary, which further reinforced this realization;
 - By grace, received into the Catholic Church at age 26.

How can you be sure that your spiritual formation is accurate & complete?

- The Bible alone is not adequate! Which interpretation?!
- We need to trust the Church Jesus established in his apostles!