



May 27, 2020: Thoughts on the Bible text

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“And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, “Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8: 18–19).

In Samaria there lived a man by the name of Simon, who was said to be a sorcerer, or a magician, and he obviously impressed the people. They must have felt that there was something special and powerful that emanated from him. Many said, “This man is the great power of God” (verse 10). Under the preaching of Philip, many of Simon’s followers also accepted the gospel and were baptised. Simon himself also followed later. When Apostles Peter and John came to Samaria from Jerusalem and laid hands on a number of baptised believers to give them the gift of the Holy Spirit, Simon offered them money so that he too would have the power to impart this gift. The Apostles rejected his offer and Peter even called upon him to repent. He had recognised the wickedness in Simon and his bondage to iniquity (verses 22–23). Simon then regretted his request and asked the Apostles to intercede for him so that he could be forgiven.

The importance of the sacraments

This report from the Acts of the Apostles, which we will deal with in today’s devotional, refers to the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Sealing. At a time when no sacraments are being administered in our Church in most regions, it is important to reflect on the meaning of the sacraments for us and our faith.

The baptism with water and then the Holy Spirit received by the people of Samaria is a reminder for us that we too were baptised and received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Most of us were probably given the two sacraments when we were young children and were at the time completely powerless and dependent on our parents or people who loved and cared for us. They were the ones who brought us to the altar of God. We had done neither good nor evil, yet God turned to us without asking if we had achieved anything or if we had any future claim or title. By receiving the sacraments we were incorporated into the body of Christ and granted the prerequisites to receive the inheritance of the firstfruits of God.

If we look back on our path of faith and life, we can surely recognise how receiving the sacraments has had an impact on us. We have been given purpose to seek after God and live according to His will. Even though the two sacraments were received only once in our lifetime, they do not remain a past event, but still have presence in our lives today. With this in mind we should honestly check with ourselves that we do justice to what we have received and that we don't lead a life centred on ourselves but one that is focused on God and on those who are around us.

Sacraments are gifts

Simon did not understand that sacraments are gifts of God. They cannot be owned as they do not belong to either the one who dispenses them nor to the one who receives them. God alone is the Lord of the sacraments; he bestows them on us, and it is up to us whether we accept or refuse His gift. We show acceptance of this gift when we believe and follow the Lord. What is wonderful and comforting is that God does not take away the sacraments when we have fallen into sin and unbelief or do not really appreciate them.

If we therefore have the sense that baptism and sealing only play a minimal role in our life of faith, then today would be a good opportunity to reflect on them. The sacraments are meant to strengthen us on the path that has been laid out for us and to help us enter into perfect communion with the triune God, which is the goal of our faith. Let us preserve our faith in the power of the sacraments. Let us accept the divine gifts for they make us secure in the belief that God both wants our salvation and will grant us our salvation!

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