

Katamares: 15: 4-12.

15:7 *The Gentiles Hear the Gospel*

GOD'S CHOSEN INSTRUMENT.

CHRYSOSTOM: See how Peter was, from the beginning, removed from the debate and how he was following the ways of the Jews even still. ² "You know," he says. Perhaps some of those who had once accused him with regard to Cornelius were present and had entered with him, so that he brings them as witnesses. "From the ancient days God chose among you." What does "among you" mean? It means either "in Palestine" or the "you" is those who were present. "Through my mouth." See how [Peter] shows that God spoke through him and there was nothing human. "And God, who knows human hearts, testified to them"—he refers them to the testimony of the Spirit—"by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us." CATENA ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 15.7-8.³

15:8 *God Gave Witness to Them*

TESTIMONY TO THEIR VIRTUE.

CHRYSOSTOM: Then he shows that it was not simply because of grace but on account of their virtue that the testimony was given to them and that what was offered to them was in no way less [than what was offered to us]. "For he made no distinction," he says, "between us and them." It is the heart then that one must always look to, and it is very aptly said, "God who knows the heart bore witness to them"; and likewise in an earlier instance, "Thou, Lord, that knows the hearts of all people." ⁴ Notice what he adds to show that this is the meaning, "he made no distinction between us and them." When he mentioned the testimony borne to them, he uttered that great word, which Paul speaks, "Neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision." ⁵ "That he may make the two one in himself." ⁶ HOMILIES ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 32.⁷

15:9 *Cleansed by Faith*

GIFTS OBTAINED THROUGH FAITH ALONE.

CHRYSOSTOM: "And God who knows the heart bore witness to them." He refers them to the spiritual testimony, "giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us." Everywhere he places the Gentiles on an

equal footing. “And he made no distinction between us and them but cleansed their hearts by faith.” From faith alone, he says, they obtained the same gifts. This is also meant as a lesson to those [objectors]; this is able to teach even them that faith alone is necessary, and not works or circumcision. For indeed they do not say all this only as an apology for the Gentiles, but also to teach [the Jewish believers] to abandon the law. For the moment, however, this is not said. “Now therefore why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” What does “make trial of God” mean? As if he were not strong enough, he means, to save by faith, that is, “why do you disbelieve God?” Thus it is from a want of faith that the law is brought in. . . . “But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” How powerful are these words! Likewise Paul says in the epistle to the Romans, “For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to glory in, but not before God.”⁸ Do you see that all this is more a lesson for them than an apology for the Gentiles? HOMILIES ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 32.⁹

FAITH THAT PURIFIES.

AUGUSTINE: Faith in God purifies the heart, the pure heart sees God. But faith is sometimes defined as followed by people who wish to deceive themselves; as if it were enough merely to believe—some people, you see, promise themselves the vision of God and the kingdom of heaven for believing while living bad lives. Against these the apostle James indignantly took umbrage out of spiritual charity, so he says in his letter, “You believe that God is one.” You pat yourself on your back for your faith; you observe that many godless people assume there are many gods, and you congratulate yourself for believing that there is only one God. “You do well. The demons also believe—and shudder.”¹⁰ Shall they too see God? Those who are pure of heart shall see him. Whoever would say that the unclean spirits are pure of heart? And yet, “they believe—and shudder.” So our faith must be distinguished from the faith of demons. Our faith, you see, purifies the heart, their faith makes them guilty. . . . So let us distinguish our faith and see that believing is not enough. That is not the sort of faith that purifies the heart. “Purifying their hearts,” it says, “by faith.” But which faith, what sort of faith? The one, surely, which the apostle Paul defines when he says “faith that works through love.”¹¹ This faith is different from the faith of demons, different from the morals of dissolute and desperate people. “Faith,” he says. “Which faith?” The one “that works through love,” hopes for what God promises. You could not have a more perfect, a more carefully thought-out definition than that. SERMON 53.10-11.¹²

15:10 *Trying God*

WHAT THE LAW CANNOT DO, FAITH CAN.

CHRYSOSTOM: Notice how he concludes with something frightening. He does not discourse to them from the prophets but from things present, of which they themselves were witnesses. Of course the prophets also add their testimony and make the reason stronger by what has now come to pass. And notice how [Peter] first allows the question to be debated in the church and then speaks. And he did not say “those of the circumcision” but “the Gentiles.” For this [gradual advance] little by little is stronger. For this is the action of one trying to see if he is able to save even after the law. Look what he does. He shows that they are in danger. For what the law could not do faith had power to do, but if faith falls off, see how they themselves are in perdition. And he did not say, “Why do you disbelieve?” which is harsher, even when the fact had been demonstrated. HOMILIES ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 32.¹⁴

THE NEW LAW OF FAITH.

AUGUSTINE: Why did he say this, unless they were saved through the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, not through the Law of Moses? Through the law there came not healing but the knowledge of sin, as the apostle teaches when he says, “For knowledge of sin came through the law. But now the righteousness of God has been revealed apart from the law, though the law and the prophets have borne witness to it.”¹⁵ Therefore, if it has been revealed, it existed at that time but was hidden. The veil of the temple signified its being hidden, and that veil was torn at Christ’s death to signify its revelation.¹⁶ At that time the grace of the one mediator between God and human beings, the man Christ Jesus, existed in the people of God, but it was hidden as rain upon fleece—a rain that God bestows on his heritage,¹⁷ not as something due but as gratuitous. But now, with the fleece squeezed dry, that is, with the Jewish people rejected, it lies revealed in all the nations as upon the threshing floor.¹⁸ ON ORIGINAL SIN 2.29.¹⁹

15:11 *Saved Through the Grace of Jesus*

ALL SALVATION COMES THROUGH THE GRACE OF CHRIST.

AUGUSTINE: You, who are enemies of this grace, reject the idea that we should believe that the people of old were saved by the same grace of Jesus Christ. Rather, you distinguish the different times in the manner of Pelagius in whose books this is found. You say that prior to the law they were saved by nature, then through the law and finally through Christ, as if for the human beings of the two earlier periods, namely,

prior to the law and under the law, the blood of Christ was not necessary. In that way, you destroy the statement, “For there is one God and one mediator between God and humankind, the man Christ Jesus.”

²⁰ AGAINST TWO LETTERS OF THE PELAGIANS 1.39.21

15:12 *All Were Silent*

NO ARROGANCE IN THE CHURCH.

CHRYSOSTOM: There was no arrogance in the church. After Peter, Paul speaks, and no one silences him. James waits patiently and does not jump up. Great is the orderliness [of the proceedings]. No word from John here, and nothing from the other apostles. They hold their peace. For James was invested with the chief rule, and they did not begrudge him, so free was their soul from love of glory. HOMILIES ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 33.3