



DEVOTIONAL TIME

12-22-2014 @ 0900

"Lord, You've Got to be Kidding!"

Acts 12:1-5



O COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL!

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem!
Come and behold Him, born the "King of Angels!"
O come, let us adore Him! O come, let us adore Him!
O come, let us adore Him...Christ, the Lord!

Acts 12:1-5

"About this time, King Herod began to persecute some members of the Church. He had James, the brother of John, put to death by the sword. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he went ahead and had Peter arrested. (This happened during the time of the Festival of Unleavened Bread.) After his arrest, Peter was put in jail, where he was handed over to be guarded by four groups of four soldiers each. Herod planned to put him on trial in public after Passover. So Peter was kept in jail, but the people of the Church were praying earnestly to God for him."

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Can you remember "times of testing", during which you "walked around on egg shells", just "waiting for the next shoe to drop" because somehow you just *knew* it would?
- Have you ever known some "dear saints of God" who amazed you at the way they handled adversity and crisis with such a sweet attitude and childlike spirit?
- Did their example affect the way you began to process "persecution", "misfortune", and "multiple disasters"? What did you learn of "trust" and "hope"?

Some days are "diamonds", charmed with chance; others are "rocks", choked with challenge...It's easy to wonder if it's even worth getting out of bed, because "disaster looms" in every direction. While such "ups" and "downs" are part of the human condition, our God doesn't want us to start locking ourselves behind deadbolt doors in lead-walled rooms, or hiding behind our couches, or under our beds. We are to stay fully engaged in life, answering His Call and sharing His Good News. Jesus Himself warned us that since "the people of the world" had hated Him, they were going to hate us who love Him. Our "work" is to hold fast to faith during "fiery trials" because such faith is more precious than "fire-tried" gold. In that faith, God initiates new outpourings of Grace and Peace to remake all creation in the image of Love. But this is no good news to the selfish and self-absorbed people who worship power, prestige, and pleasure. They will set "speed bumps", "barricades", and "mine fields" on the roads we may have to travel in the service of the Lord. They will do all in their power to nullify anything that threatens their "programs" or "social position". So... "thorny problems" and "tough times" come to all who dare to follow Jesus Christ. While everyone in this world faces some challenging moments, the disciples of Jesus Christ get extra *supernatural* Help that comes only from God. Being a Christian gets us no "free pass" on troubling times. As "Children of God", we are still part of this world, and affected by all that happens in it. The Book of Acts clues us in to the knowledge that we are not left alone in crisis. God, grant us the Grace of Blessed Assurance! Help us see You are always with us, sustaining us in every crisis with marvelous Grace, and setting us free of fear with Faithfulness, Care, and Power. In our severest tests, we may burst out with a "Job-like" jibe: "Lord, You've got to be kidding!" Even so, show us Your Love. Times may be tough. Life may be painful. "Lead us through" 'til we know You've got it all under control, and are preparing us for ever greater signs of Your everlasting Love and faultless Fidelity. Then we shall praise You with joy!



DEVOTIONAL TIME

12-23-2014 @ 0900

“The Lord’s Literal ‘Get-Out-of-Jail-Free’ Card”

Acts 12:6-10



O COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem!
Come and behold Him, born the “King of Angels”!
O come, let us adore Him! O come, let us adore Him!
O come, let us adore Him...Christ, the Lord!

Acts 12:6-10

The night before Herod was going to bring him (Peter) out to the people, Peter was sleeping between two guards. He was tied with two chains, and there were guards on duty at the prison gate. Suddenly an Angel of the Lord stood there, and a light shone in the cell. The Angel shook Peter by the shoulder, woke him up, and said, “Hurry! Get up!” At once, the chains fell off Peter’s hands. Then the Angel said, “Tighten your belt and put on your sandals.” Peter did so, and the Angel said, “Put your cloak around you, and come with me.” Peter followed him out of the prison, not knowing, however, if what the Angel was doing was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed by the first guard station, and then the second, and came at last to the iron gate that opens into the city. The gate opened for them by itself, and they went out. They walked down a street, and suddenly the Angel left Peter.

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever been in a “jam” so desperate, a “cave” so deep and dark, or hanging from a “cliff” so high and remote, you started thinking, “I’m doomed! There’s no way out of this”?
- Have you known moments of “last-minute rescue” or “right-on-time” delivery that seemed far too coincidental to be “coincidence”? Did you ever sense prayer had played a part in that?
- Have you ever observed “amazing faith” of other believers, who had every reason to be terror-stricken or despondent, yet they displayed a calm spirit with trust that defied reason?

Just how “big” and “powerful” is your God? Can your God literally “set you free”, really FREE from any earthly bondage, even actual physical chains and bars if necessary? Most of us today have trouble really believing God is “ready, able, and willing” to provide such “earthy” liberation. Oh, we claim to believe that He can forgive our sins, and hopefully take us to Heaven, and every now and then we actually believe He may have actually cured somebody, (maybe even us!) Of course the doctors may have done it, or we may have just gotten better “naturally”. Our “belief” often stops just short of authentic *faith*. How many times have you heard this story of Peter’s jail break? Do you actually believe that it happened just the way the Bible portrays it? Do you believe that God could or would do the same for you? Most of us today, if we were honest, would have to say “probably not!” We read the “sacred stories”, but usually view them as just that—pious *stories*...tales presented to give us a sense of how personal our God has been for others, but not what *He is* for us here and now. But here’s the “kicker”: these accounts are *history*; at some real time in our past, they actually happened! The God who acted then can still liberate the “imprisoned” today! No matter where you are or what you face, God can help you deal with it. God, grant us the Grace of Gritty Trust! Help us see it’s not about what has happened to us; it’s about what You can do for us, with us, and through us, right in the midst of life. Let us view our situations as occasions in which You can “show up and show off” providential Love, to heal the sick, raise the dead, walk on water, feed 5,000 with a picnic for one, and even break us out of jail to reveal Your constant Care for all who will trust You in everything!



DEVOTIONAL TIME

12-24-2014 @ 0900

"What Will It Take to Make You Believe?"

Acts 12:11-15



O COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem!
Come and behold Him, born the "King of Angels!"
O come, let us adore Him! O come, let us adore Him!
O come, let us adore Him...Christ, the Lord!

Acts 12:11-15

Then Peter realized what had happened to him, and said, "Now I know that it is really true! The Lord sent His Angel to rescue me from Herod's power, and from everything the Jewish people expected to happen." Aware of his situation, he went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. Peter knocked at the outside door, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer it. She recognized Peter's voice, and was so happy that she ran back in without opening the door, and announced that Peter was standing outside. "You are crazy!" they told her. But she insisted that it was true. So they answered, "It is his angel."

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever heard a report, or read a story, related as "gospel truth", which was so fantastic and outlandish you found it very difficult (if not impossible) to believe?
- Can you remember an actual event in life that so amazed you it made "faith come alive" as it suddenly dawned on you "only God could have pulled that off"?
- What did it mean to you that God had actually answered you, (or others who were praying for you,) and moved with awesome power in your behalf?

It's so amazing to see how little credit God gets these days! Almost every other entity in the "situation" gets a "spotlight" before we finally, almost grudgingly acknowledge God's role. ("Thank goodness the x-rays were read wrong!" "It was such a blessing to hear that Dr. X misdiagnosed the problem!" "I was so lucky to have walked through that door just then!" "If I hadn't misplaced my keys that day, I would have missed that phone call!") How many similar "explanations" have we heard, or even used for ourselves on occasion? Yet the Promise of the Gospel is that God is constantly working in us, with us, and through us all our lives! Notice how Luke affirms: "then Peter realized what had happened", followed by "Now I know that it is really true!" Equally amazing is the reaction of those who are busy praying for Peter! First the servant girl, Rhoda, recognizes his voice, and is so shocked and excited, she runs to tell the others, but forgets to open the door for Peter. Then, when they hear her report, the others refuse to believe that it could even be Peter; they propose that if she heard his voice, it must be his "ghost"...Herod must have killed him already, and Peter's ghost was visiting them. They were mistaken, of course, but would we have believed Rhoda's report any more easily? Consider that we are concluding Advent, our period of preparation for the celebration of Christmas. How ready are we to BELIEVE in the unconditional generosity of our Heavenly Father? On this Christmas Eve, can we open minds and hearts to the Wonder of this Feast, and begin to let our faith soar higher than it has ever flown before? God, grant us the Grace to embrace Your Promise! As Christmas dawns, help us take the word, "impossible", out of our vocabulary, and begin believing You for all good gifts! Rhoda, the servant girl, wasn't crazy; Peter wasn't dreaming, and You are truly capable of more than we can possibly imagine. Spark a faith within us that affirms, "Now we know Your Word to us is really true!" Let Jesus Christ be truly and fully born anew in our hearts and lives. Merry Christmas!