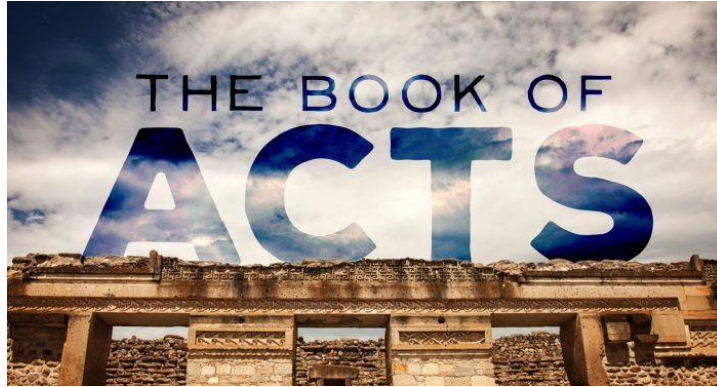


EDGE Lesson Plan – Acts of the Apostles/Early Church



Acts of the Apostles

- Our best source about the early Church comes from the Acts of the Apostles. Acts is recognized as being written by Luke (also author of the Gospel of Luke). Acts was written in approximately 80 A.D. and is seen as a continuation of Luke's gospel.
- This account of the early Church was written primarily for the Gentile (non-Jewish) Christians who were allowed to become Christian without first being required to be practicing Jews (Acts 15:1-35).
- Acts describes the ideal Christian community—its growth and development— as well as its challenges in spreading the gospel of Jesus. The work of the Holy Spirit in aiding the spread of the gospel is a major theme in Acts.
- In Acts, we see Christianity spreading from Jerusalem ('the mother church') to Rome ('the end of the earth') through the work of two missionaries: Peter and Paul.
- Being a Christian isn't easy. The religious authorities tried to suppress Christianity and prevent followers of Christ from spreading the Gospels. Before long, the Romans also started persecuting the Christians because they refused to worship the pagan Roman gods.

Development of the Early Church



Just after the death of Jesus, the Catholic Church was very different from the one we know today. There was a relatively small number of followers. You wouldn't find a church on every street corner offering several Masses every Sunday. Worship was different. Even the Bible was different – keep in mind that St. Paul didn't begin writing his New Testament letters until some 20 to 30 years after Jesus' resurrection. The first of the Gospels didn't appear until about 10 years after that.

The Roman authorities who killed Jesus were afraid of his power and jealous of his influence. They viewed him as a threat to their own power. Once he was crucified, they turned their attention to others who preached, taught and healed in Jesus' name. The Acts of the Apostles contains numerous stories of how the apostles and other followers of Jesus were attacked, imprisoned, and killed. Paul, for example, wrote many of his letters from prison but the early Christians persisted through such persecution. They continued to follow Jesus and to bring others to the Church and be witnesses to his truth.

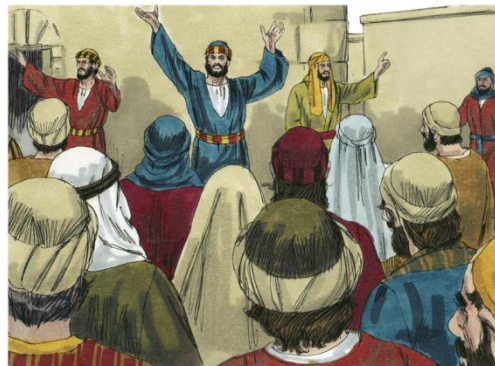
How did they do that? The same way that you have come to know about family members that you've never met or that live far away from you, like grandparents, great-grandparents, aunt, uncles, and cousins. They shared stories and passed on traditions over the years and over many miles.

The Apostles and other disciples of Jesus passed on the Gospel orally, through their preaching, their example, and through worship and prayer they taught to others. In the Catholic Church, we call this "Sacred Tradition." They also passed on the Gospel in writing, so that people in different parts of the world could learn the message the same way and so that the message could survive and continue to be shared; we call this "Sacred Scripture."

The Gospel continues to be shared and the Church continues to grow through Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, even today. We learn through Tradition when we go to Mass or take part in the Sacraments. We learn through Sacred Scripture when we read the Bible or hear the Word proclaimed.

We are called to be witnesses in numerous ways. Socially, are you willing to witness the truth of Jesus even if it means getting made fun of at school? Are you willing to be a living witness of God in your homes even if you don't feel understood or supported, at times? Are you willing to be persecuted for your beliefs in high school or college, or is it more important to "fit in"? God is calling you to be a witness to His love, the same way He called those in the early Church. The Gospel message is simple, but living it is not easy.

Lesson Summary:



- a. Jesus passed on the responsibility of spreading God's truth throughout the world to his apostles.
- b. The apostles in turn passed on the Gospel and the responsibility for spreading it to other followers, despite being persecuted by the Roman authorities in the very beginning. When we are successful, we should give glory to God.
- c. Over the years, the Church grew through the development of Tradition, or the oral sharing of stories and practices, and Sacred Scripture, or the written Word of God.
- d. The Church continues to grow in these ways even today.

After reviewing this material, watch the YouTube videos using the link below:

<https://youtu.be/CGbNw855ksw> Part 1

<https://youtu.be/Z-17KxpjL0Q> Part 2

After watching the videos, proceed to the quiz/discussion questions here:

<https://stodiliachurch.wufoo.com/forms/q1xd0yte1miotet/>