The gospels this week all come from John, chapter 16, the part of Jesus’ “Last Supper Discourse” in which he speaks about the coming of the Holy Spirit. He calls it the “Advocate,” also the “Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father.” Jesus assures his disciples that after he is gone, the Spirit will enlighten, guide and protect them. For many of us, Jesus’ promise of the Holy Spirit immediately evokes thoughts of Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured out on the disciples in the Upper Room. However, for an even more convincing display of the Spirit’s power, we might look to the missionary travels of St. Paul.

All this week, Paul and his companions are evangelizing throughout mainland Greece, *where they never intended to go*. Paul’s goal for his second missionary journey was to revisit the communities that he had already established in Asia Minor and then head due West to Ephesus and the other port cities on the coast of the Aegean Sea. However, the Holy Spirit directed him Northwest instead, toward the Bosphorus Straits, where Turkey and Greece meet. Then, a vision prompted him to cross over and evangelize in Macedonia (Northern Greece). Responding to that movement of the Spirit opens up a whole new world to Paul and his companions — and the Christian faith. They move quickly through Macedonia, establishing Christian communities in Phillipi, Thessalonica and Boroea. Next, they continue southward to Athens and Corinth, in the Province of Achaia.

This missionary journey, like all the others, certainly is not without its hardships and setbacks. In Philippi, Paul and Silas are beaten and imprisoned. But, when they are miraculously freed from confinement, they end up converting the jailer and his entire family! Moving on to Thessalonica and Boroea, they again have success in winning disciples for Christ, but they have to flee both cities to avoid getting beaten by a mob of unbelievers.

In Athens, Paul encounters a much more sophisticated crowd. In his famous speech at the Areopagus, Paul commends the Athenians for their piety, but informs them that they have been worshipping in ignorance, thinking that *many gods* were responsible for the wonders accomplished by the *One true God*, the Lord of heaven and earth. Winning over this crowd was a tall order, but Paul manages to stir up debate and even convince a few.

Corinth becomes very fertile territory for the Christian faith, especially among the Gentiles. Paul, Silas and Timothy establish a thriving community there and remain with them for a year and a half. They also meet a married couple from Rome, named Aquila and Priscilla, who become key helpers to Paul. He brings them to Asia and makes them leaders of the new community that he establishes in Ephesus.

All of these adventures suggest rather strongly that the Holy Spirit was guiding Paul and his companions and directing the evolution of the Early Church. No wonder they were able to overcome so many adversities and achieve so much success.