



September 20
Kavala & Philippi



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My dear Little Flower - co-pilgrims on this journey,

Today, I will speak to you about three things:

- 1. the word "Agape"**
- 2. St Lydia**
- 3. Kavala and the ancient city of Philippi**

Agape:

In the Greek tradition, the word *Agape* refers to a deep, selfless love that transcends mere emotion or attraction. It's often contrasted with other forms of love, such as *eros* (romantic love) and *philia* (friendship or brotherly love). In both contexts, *agape* represents a more universal, unconditional form of love, one that is sacrificial and seeks the well-being of others.

In early Christianity texts, *agape* took on a special meaning, often used to describe the love that Christians are called to show toward God and one another. It is seen as the highest form of love, reflecting God's very nature. *Agape*, in the Christian sense, is self-sacrificial, universal and unconditional, and covenantal.



AGAPE



09/19/2024

In the letter of St Paul to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 13) as patient, kind, and enduring, often interpreted as the highest form of love that reflects God's own love for humanity. Furthermore, in Christianity, *agape* took on a context of a *Sacred Meal*. The Sacred Meal (the Holy Eucharist) symbolizes communal love and fellowship. *Agape* meals, often referred to as *agape feasts* or love feasts, were gatherings of the early Christian community to express their mutual love and unity, in line with the spirit of *agape*, - selfless, unconditional, and covenantal love.

In early Church, the *agape feast* was a social and religious meal where members of the Christian community came together to share food and fellowship. This meal was not just about eating but about embodying the love Christians were called to have for one another, especially across social and economic divides.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass:

Initially, the *agape feasts* were closely linked with the celebration of the Eucharist (the Lord's Supper), where bread and wine shared in remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice. Over time, the Eucharist and the *agape feasts* become distinct, but both emphasized the importance of unity, equality, and love within the Christian community. These meals often has a charitable dimension. Christians would bring food, and the surplus would be given to the poor, reflecting the early Church's concern for the marginalized and the idea that *agape* love involves caring for others in tangible ways.

Agape and its Spiritual Fellowship Context:

While the New Testament doesn't explicitly call these meals "agape feasts", there are references that seem to allude to them: Jude 1:12 mentions *love feasts* warning against those who would attend without true faith or love. Acts 2:42 describes the early Christians as devoted to fellowship and the breaking of bread together, suggesting a practice of communal meals that included both the Eucharist and the *agape feast*.

Lydia of Thyatira

*One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named
Lydia,
a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God.
The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.
When she and the members of her household were baptized,
she invited us to her home.
"If you consider me a believer in the Lord,"
she said, "come and stay at my house."
And she persuaded us.
(Acts 16:14-15)*

Lydia of Thyatira holds great significance in the second missionary journey of St. Paul, as she is often recognized as the first documented convert to Christianity in Europe. Her conversion and role in the early church highlight several important aspects of Paul's mission and the spread of Christianity.

Meeting Paul in Philippi

During Paul's second missionary journey (around AD 49-52), he traveled to Philippi in Macedonia, a Roman colony. It was there, near a river outside the city gate, that Paul met Lydia and other women during a prayer meeting. Philippi didn't seem to have a synagogue, so this group of women likely gathered for worship and prayer in an informal setting (Acts 16:13-15).

Businesswoman from Thyatira

Lydia was a wealthy businesswoman and a dealer in purple cloth, a luxury item in the Roman world, which indicates her financial success. Purple dye was expensive, so Lydia's trade likely involved upper-class clients. This background suggests that she had significant influence and resources, which would later play a role in supporting Paul's ministry.

First European Convert

Lydia is widely regarded as the first recorded European convert to Christianity. She was already a "worshiper of God," meaning she was a Gentile who followed Jewish monotheism. Upon hearing Paul preach the gospel, "the Lord opened her heart to respond" (Acts 16:14). Her baptism, along with her household, marks the beginning of the Christian church in Europe.

Hospitality to Paul and His Companions

After her conversion, Lydia invited Paul and his companions to stay at her house. This act of hospitality is significant as it established her home as the first meeting place for Christians in Philippi. In the absence of formal church buildings, early Christians often met in homes, and Lydia's house likely became a key location for the church's gatherings (Acts 16:15).

Expansion of the Gospel to Europe

Lydia's conversion marks the first step in the spread of Christianity to Europe, a major turning point in the history of the Christian faith. Paul's vision of the "man of Macedonia" ([Acts 16:9-10](#)) urging him to come to Macedonia is fulfilled in his encounter with Lydia, which further illustrates how God was directing Paul's mission.

Role of Women in the Early Church

Lydia - canonized a saint in the 16th century in the Catholic church - exemplifies the prominent role that women played in the early Christian movement. As a businesswoman, householder, and believer, she was likely influential in the Christian community in Philippi. Her story is part of a broader pattern in the New Testament where women, despite the male-dominated culture of the time, actively participated in spreading the gospel and supporting the church.

Significance of Lydia for pilgrims

For pilgrims, Lydia's story serves as a reminder that their journey of faith is part of a larger narrative of God's work in the world. It encourages pilgrims to recognize the diversity of the Christian community and the role that each individual can play in contributing to its growth.

Lydia's hospitality and support for Paul's ministry emphasize the importance of welcoming and supporting those who are seeking spiritual guidance. Pilgrims can emulate Lydia's example by offering hospitality and encouragement to fellow pilgrims on their journeys. We are all pilgrims on a journey; it is our important role to give encouragement, love and welcome to all who are called by God to this spiritual journey.

St. Lydia's conversion underscores the significance of women in the early church. Despite the patriarchal culture of the time, Lydia emerges as a prominent figure, demonstrating that women were actively involved in spreading the gospel and shaping the early Christian communities.

Pilgrims can draw inspiration from Lydia's unwavering faith, which enabled her to respond to the message of Christ and become a pillar of the early church in Philippi. Her story encourages all of us to trust in God's guiding hand and to embrace the transformative power of faith.



Kavala, a city in northern Greece, holds historical and biblical significance, particularly in connection to the 2nd missionary journeys of St. Paul the Apostle. Known in ancient times as Neapolis, Kavala was a key port city during the Roman Empire and served as a gateway to Philippi, an important location in Paul's missionary work.

Key Significance of Kavala (Neapolis):

1. Port of Entry for St. Paul's Mission to Europe:

- On his second missionary journey (around AD 49-52), St. Paul traveled from Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) to Europe. Kavala (Neapolis) was his first stop in Europe, as recorded in Acts 16:11: "We put out to sea from Troas and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis."

- From Neapolis, Paul journeyed to Philippi, about 15 kilometers inland, where he established the first Christian church in Europe. Kavala served as the entry point for Paul's ministry on the European continent.

2. Gateway to Philippi:

- Philippi, which is closely associated with Kavala, was a Roman colony and a major city on the Via Egnatia, the ancient Roman road that connected the Adriatic Sea to the Bosphorus. This road was an important trade and military route, and Neapolis (Kavala) was the main port serving Philippi.

- Paul's work in Philippi, including the conversion of Lydia and the establishment of the Philippian church, had profound implications for the spread of Christianity in Europe. Kavala, as the first place Paul set foot in Europe, symbolizes the beginning of this crucial phase of his mission.

3. Modern-Day Pilgrimage:

- Today, Kavala is part of the Pauline route, which follows the steps of St. Paul's journey through Greece. It is a popular site for Christian pilgrims tracing Paul's missionary journeys. Kavala's close proximity to the ancient city of Philippi makes it a key starting point for visiting the archaeological site where Paul preached and was imprisoned.

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*As we live out the spirit of St. Paul and the conversion of the Philippians, may we experience the same joy and peace that they did. May we find ourselves drawn ever closer to God and to one another, and may we become a powerful force for good in the world.*

*May the Lord guide and strengthen us on this journey, and may the spirit of St. Paul and the Philippians be ever present in our hearts and minds.*

Your parish priest,  
Fr JC Merino