

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

LECTIONARY #52

READING I Acts of the Apostles 6:1-7

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

As the number of **disciples** continued to **grow**,
the **Hellenists** complained **against** the Hebrews
because their **widows**
were being **neglected** in the daily **distribution**.
So the Twelve called together the **community** of the disciples
and said,
"It is **not** right for us to **neglect** the **word of God** to serve
at table.

Brothers, **select** from among you **seven reputable men**,
filled with the **Spirit and wisdom**,
whom we shall **appoint** to this task,
whereas we shall **devote** ourselves to **prayer**
and to the **ministry of the word**."

The **proposal** was **acceptable** to the whole community,
so they chose **Stephen**, a man **filled** with **faith** and the
Holy Spirit,
also **Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas**,
and **Nicholas of Antioch**, a convert to Judaism.

They **presented** these men to the apostles
who **prayed** and **laid hands** on them. >>

Start to proclaim in an informative tone.

Hellenists = HEL-uh-nists = Greek-speaking
Jewish Christians.

Pause before you begin the instructions of
the apostles.

Keep your energy and volume up. Take your
time with the names.

Prochorus = PRAH-kuh-ruhs
Nicanor = nĪ-KAY-nuhr
Timon = TĪ-muhn
Parmenas = PAHR-muh-nuhs
Antioch = AN-tee-ahk

READING I

The first portraits of the Church in Acts of the Apostles present a community of one heart and mind. Besides their common belief in Jesus, the first believers in Jerusalem shared their Jewish heritage, the tradition of caring for those in need, and a common language. As the Church grew, its membership became more diverse, eventually comprising Samaritans and Gentiles, people who came from the Diaspora and spoke different languages. Today's reading describes the challenge to Church unity that arose in this context of widening diversity, specifi-

cally a conflict between Hebrews and Hellenists. *Hebrews* refers to Palestinian Jews who spoke Aramaic and comprised the earliest followers of Jesus, including the Twelve. *Hellenists* may refer either to Greek-speaking Gentile Christians or to Jews who spoke only Greek. Whoever was meant by the designation Hellenists, the different language along with differences in culture resulted in different treatment, exemplified in the neglect of the widows among the Hellenists.

Widows, as well as orphans and sojourners, receive special attention in the

Torah. Even more importantly, Jesus' compassion to such often-isolated people presented a pattern for the Church to follow. Neglect in the daily distribution for the Hellenist widows means that they did not receive the traditional help to the marginalized commanded in the Torah and exhibited by Jesus. Recognizing that fidelity to Jesus, the material needs of the widows, and the unity of the Church are all at stake, the Twelve call the assembly of the disciples together. Rather than making the decision alone, the Twelve have involved the broader community in solving the conflict.

The word of God continued to spread,
and the number of the **disciples** in Jerusalem
increased greatly;
even a **large** group of **priests** were becoming **obedient**
to the faith.

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 33:1-2, 4-5, 18-19 (22)

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

or

R. Alleluia.

Exult, you just, in the LORD;
praise from the upright is fitting.
Give thanks to the LORD on the harp;
with the ten-stringed lyre chant
his praises.

See, the eyes of the LORD are upon those
who fear him,
upon those who hope for his kindness,
to deliver them from death
and preserve them in spite of famine.

Upright is the word of the LORD,
and all his works are trustworthy.
He loves justice and right;
of the kindness of the LORD the earth is full.

READING II 1 Peter 2:4-9

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Peter

Beloved:

Come to him, a living stone, **rejected** by human beings
but **chosen** and **precious** in the sight of God,
and, like living stones,
let **yourselves** be built into a **spiritual** house
to be a **holy** priesthood to offer **spiritual** sacrifices
acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

For it says in Scripture:

Behold, *I am laying a stone in Zion,*
a cornerstone, chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in it shall not be put to shame.

We are called to holiness from St. Peter. Be
inviting in your tone as you read.

Zion = Zī-uhn or Zī-ahn

They are to make the selection of seven men filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom. The seven men chosen all bear Greek names, indicating that they were Hellenists, thereby extending the leadership and care of believers beyond its Hebrew origins. Appointed to fulfill the task of the daily distribution, they will go further than this one task. Two of them, Stephen and Philip, will share in the apostolic mission of preaching in fulfillment of Jesus' mandate. Stephen was even the first to bear witness by giving his life, following the example of Jesus. The conflict between

the two groups thus resulted not in further division, but in the widening of service and extension of the Gospel.

READING II Much of the imagery in the biblical tradition is based on readily observable objects that provide insight into unseen, spiritual realities. In today's reading from Peter's first letter, the author creatively uses stone imagery from psalms and prophets to develop his teaching about Christ and the Church. As he uses the stone motif, Peter gives the ancient texts and symbols new meaning. First, he

develops the stone symbol from the writings of Isaiah, in which God lays a cornerstone in Zion. For Isaiah in the eighth century BC, "Zion" could refer to the city of Jerusalem as well as to its inhabitants. God has made both the city and its people, chosen and precious, the foundation stone standing secure against foreign enemies and corrupt leaders. Now, according to Peter, it is Christ himself who is the chosen and precious stone; even though rejected, Christ is a living and effective cornerstone. Peter exhorts the people united to Christ

Pause before you begin this line.

Proclaim with conviction and passion.

Proclaim Jesus' words in a gentle but firm tone.

Jesus is clear about how we know his Father. Let the assembly hear that in your tone.

also to become living stones for God to build into a spiritual house.

Continuing to draw on the stone metaphor, Peter uses Psalm 118 in which the rejected stone that becomes the cornerstone refers to the people of Israel. As in his interpretation of Isaiah, Peter gives new significance to the cornerstone, now understood to be Christ. With Christ as the cornerstone, the people are living stones who fulfill God's ancient promise, "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). The entire people, chosen, priestly, and holy, belong to God.

Therefore, its value is for **you** who have faith, but for those **without** faith:

*The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,*

and

*a stone that will make people stumble,
and a rock that will make them fall.*

They stumble by **disobeying** the word, as is their destiny.

You are "a **chosen race**, a **royal priesthood**,
a **holy nation**, a people of **his** own,
so that you may **announce** the praises" of him
who called you **out** of darkness into his **wonderful light**.

GOSPEL John 14:1-12

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

Jesus said to his disciples:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled.

You have faith **in** God; have faith **also in me**.

In my Father's house there are **many** dwelling places.

If there were **not**,

would I have told you that I am going to **prepare** a place
for you?

And **if I go** and prepare a place for you,

I will **come back** again and **take you** to myself,

so that **where** I am you **also** may be.

Where I am going **you know** the way."

Thomas said to him,

"Master, we do **not** know where you are going;

how can we know the way?"

Jesus said to him, "**I am the way and the truth and the life.**

No one comes to the Father **except through me**.

If you **know me**, then you will **also know my Father**. >>

As a priestly people they participate in Christ's unique priesthood. Together, as a temple of living stones, the holy people announce the praises of the God who has called them from darkness to light.

GOSPEL At his last supper with his disciples, Jesus prepared them for his impending passion through a long and intimate farewell discourse. Typical of farewell addresses to family and friends, such as that of the patriarch Jacob, Jesus uses this final opportunity to teach, comfort, warn, and inspire his followers.

Throughout his discourse, he reminds them of his earlier instruction and promises, gives them guidance for their future, and draws them ever more deeply into relationship with him, with his Father, and with one another. Although they are understandably troubled, Jesus begins by advising them to move from troubled hearts to believing. The believing that Jesus desires in all his disciples is more than adherence to a creed or set of truths, but is characterized by personal trust and fidelity, the kind of believing Jesus always showed to his Father. Jesus is telling his troubled disciples to trust that,