

# 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.

Hellenists = HEL-uh-nists

This reading hinges on a dispute between the Hellenists and the Hebrews. The Hellenists were presumably Greek-speaking Jewish Christians, where the Hebrews were Aramaic-speaking Jewish Christians. The Hellenists are feeling short-changed at the communal meals.

Emphasis on “we.” The apostles want to give over management of meals to community members so that that can devote themselves to the ministry of the word.

Prochorus = PRAH-kuh-ruhs

Nicanor = nī-KAY-nuhr

Timon = Tī-muhn

Parmenas = PAHR-muh-nuhs

Antioch = AN-tee-ahk

Names. No need to overdo it but add some reverence to your voice as you speak the names of these early members of the Church.

**READING I** Acts of the Apostles provides the account of the calling and the “ordaining” of the first deacons in the Church. Revealed in this short passage is an infant Church that is struggling with growing pains. Acts wishes to portray the early Church as striving to persevere in unity in community life, in worship, and in charitable outreach (see Acts 2:42-47). However, here we see unrest in the community as some members are complaining that their needs are being ignored while others are receiving special treatment. In particular, it is the Greek-speaking

members of the community who are arguing that their widows are being neglected “in the daily distribution.” The growing pains experienced here are those of growing diversity within the Church; the Hellenists represent both a different culture and a different language. This accusation of bias serves as a bridge between the early Church centered in Jerusalem and the expansion of the Church into missionary territory.

It is significant to note that the seven men chosen for the task of diaconal service all have Greek names. Because they are Hellenists, they remain subordinate to the

apostles, who maintain the tradition of handing a portion of their authority through prayer and the laying on of hands. Acts is very clear to list the responsibilities of the apostles: theirs is the ministry of prayer and preaching the Word. The specific role of the seven men chosen for service is not specified, but we may assume that it is attending to the needs of those who are often overlooked, namely the widows whom God promised to sustain (see Jeremiah 49:11). Luke tells us that this decision to expand apostolic leadership had great success, as the apostles were able to

The reading concludes on a note of the success of the apostles' intervention.

For meditation and context:

**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.**

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. >>***

This section of Peter's letter is built on the unusually powerful metaphor of "living stone." Something both foundational and animated.

Peter uses Scripture to draw out his metaphor.

Zion = Zi-uhn or Zi-ahn

spread the Word of God, and the Church continued to grow in numbers. This internal conflict allows Luke to show the need to broaden various ministries as the Church continues to grow and mature.

**READING II** The First Letter of St. Peter addresses a group of persecuted Christians in Asia Minor around the time of Nero and the burning of the city of Rome in AD 64. As one of the seven "catholic epistles," or universal letters, it employs the authorship of Peter as a means of encouraging Christians to persevere in the

hope of salvation through Christ, despite harsh rejection from the world.

Vivid language is used in this passage to express both the strength of individual and communal faith of those who come to Christ. Christians are portrayed here as stones that are being "built up into a spiritual house" with Christ as the foundation stone. Even though he has been rejected by humans, God has chosen him. With this "living stone," the temple of the Church surely cannot be destroyed. Referring to Isaiah 28:16, the author describes the cor-

nerstone of the church, which is Christ, as "chosen and precious."

Therefore, faith in Christ is seen as a valuable gift for those who believe. For people without faith, it makes sense that they choose to reject the gift, since they do not have the means of perceiving its value. Again, employing the writing of the prophet Isaiah, this rejected stone becomes a problem for his own people; Christ is called "a stone that will make people stumble" for those who do not believe (see Isaiah 8:14). The failure to believe is blamed on the people's disobedience.

Peter is quoting here from Psalm 118:22— even though it is very familiar, proclaim it afresh.

The tone of the reading's conclusion is rousing.

A declarative tone pervades this reading. When Jesus speaks, he is doing so forcefully.

Slight pause between "am" and "you."

Familiar though this declaration is, proclaim it as though it is being said for the first time. Slight pause between "Father" and "except."

Finally, the passage concludes with a description of the value of being built up together as living stones. Christians enjoy chosen status because of their faith in Christ. However, just as in the Book of Exodus which the author of 1 Peter references, when God chose the Israelites as "a people of his own," calling them "a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (see Exodus 19:6), this designation comes with responsibility. Even in persecution, Christians are not meant to hide away in secret, but rather, they must proclaim God's praises. Coming to Christ involves rejecting the darkness of

**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.**

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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.**

**GOSPEL**

Chapter 14 of the Gospel of John is part of Jesus' farewell discourse to his disciples at the Last Supper. John depicts Jesus as fully aware of his disciples' fragile faith, as they will struggle to know what direction to take when he is no longer with them to guide them. As Jesus commands his disciples to have no fear, he alludes to his death and resurrection and even of his return. By the time John writes his Gospel, the understanding

of the parousia had changed significantly from an ushering in of a royal and mighty power to the belief that Christ would return to gather together all who had believed in him in this life. For this reason, Jesus speaks of preparing "many dwelling places" ahead of time for all who wait expectantly for his return.

In response to this talk about Jesus' leave-taking, Thomas utters the basic concern of all the disciples: "we do not know where you are going." The answer that Jesus gives is that he is "the way and the truth and the life." In the Acts of the Apostles,

The pervasive tone of the conclusion of this Gospel reading is mysterious. But don't discount Jesus' slight irritation at Philip. You can color your proclamation in very slight irritation.

From **now on** you **do know** him and have **seen** him."

Philip **said** to him,

"**Master**, show us the **Father**, and that will be **enough** for us."

Jesus **said** to him, "Have I been **with** you for so **long a time** and you **still** do not **know** me, Philip?

**Whoever** has **seen** me has **seen** the **Father**.

**How** can you **say**, '**Show** us the **Father**'?

Do you not **believe** that I am in the **Father** and the **Father** is in **me**?

The **words** that I **speak** to you I do not **speak** on my **own**.

The **Father** who **dwells** in me is **doing** his **works**.

**Believe** me that I am in the **Father** and the **Father** is in **me**, or **else**, **believe** because of the **works themselves**.

**Amen, amen**, I **say** to you,

whoever **believes** in me will do the **works** that I **do**,

and will do **greater ones** than **these**,

because I am **going** to the **Father**."

Christian life is called "the way" (Acts 9:2). The words "truth" and "life" are means of explaining the way. Very simply, in the Gospel of John having faith is the source of truth and life. Writing at a time when many Christians were beginning to leave the faith because Jesus had not yet returned, Jesus' self-description here is meant to bolster the confidence of Christians to remain in the faith.

Jesus contends that adherence to him is the only way that one finds access to God. And yet this continues to be a concern for his disciples; they will not be satisfied

until they have "seen" God. In addressing this issue put on the lips of Phillip, Jesus chastises his followers for not being able to see and understand the intimate connection between himself and his Father. This intimacy is prevalent throughout John's Gospel, beginning with the prologue in which the author's high Christology describes Jesus as the Word who was with God before the world began (see John 1:1). For readers of John's Gospel, who are unable to see Jesus in the flesh, trusting in their faith and accomplishing great works in his name ought to be signs enough that

the Son and the Father are one. Those who see with the eyes of faith see the way, the truth, and the life; this sight is far greater than anything perceived by human sight alone. S.W.