

5th Sunday of Easter, Year A

Acts 6: 1-7

¹As the number of disciples continued to grow, This is the first time that ALL THE BAPTIZED Christians were called “disciples” and not just those who were followers of Jesus DURING his life on earth. What has happened is that after his Ascension into heaven, Jesus continues his work through the Church which he founded.⁵ **the Hellenists** These were Jews who had been born and lived for a time outside Palestine. They spoke Greek and had synagogues of their own where the Greek translation of Scripture was used.¹² **complained against the Hebrews** These were Jews born in Palestine; they spoke Aramaic and used the Hebrew Bible in their synagogues.¹² **because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.** This most likely refers to the day-to-day survival effort by the unworldly, enthusiastic Christian community rather than to any assistance program to the Jewish society at large. One can easily imagine why widowed immigrants faced special economic hardships and why they might be “overlooked” in a food distribution run by the native contingent.¹²

²So 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.

³Brothers, select from among you seven The number 7 means complete. This is the second identifiable group of disciples entrusted with a ministry in the Church, the first, of course, being “the twelve”.⁵ **reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint** It is significant that they did not ask for volunteers but that the men were called forth from the community. **to this task,** The distribution of food was a public role in the community but it is clear that it extended beyond the distribution of relief to the care of souls.⁵ We can see this in the life of Stephen who worked signs and wonders and was almost immediately depicted as a preacher and debater.¹ This selection was actually a way of sharing authority over the community. The Seven received their authority from the authority of the 12 through being ordained by them.⁴ Leadership was not hereditary but charismatic, and no one could assume its functions unless he had first received the gift of the spirit. The institution of charismatic leadership emphasized the providential guidance of Yahweh.⁸

⁴whereas we shall devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

⁵The proposal was acceptable to the whole community, so they chose They chose seven men who all had Greek names.¹⁰ **Stephen, a man filled with faith and the Holy Spirit,** Stephen seems to have been a spiritual giant among the deacons as 3 times in the short record we have of him, Luke mentions the fullness of the Spirit in him. We know that he preached the word, which upset people to the point of stoning him to death in 36 AD in Jerusalem. With his last breath, St. Stephen, the first martyr, prayed that God would forgive his killers.⁵ **also Philip,** Philip was the first to announce the gospel in Samaria, where he converted Simon the magician and later, on a journey from Jerusalem to Gaza, he converted the eunuch of the queen of Ethiopia. Acts also mentions that he resided in Caesarea with four unmarried daughters who all prophesied.¹ **Prochorus,** This man was a scribe for the Apostle John.¹¹ **Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas,** There is no other record about the lives of these men. **and Nicholas of Antioch, a convert to Judaism.** Nicholas had been a pagan but he became a Jew through circumcision and observance of the Law of Moses. Sometime later he

converted to Christianity. Married to a young and beautiful wife, he led a life of impeccable chastity and austerity and successfully encouraged his son and daughter to live as life-long virgins.¹

6They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid hands on them. The laying on of hands is a special rite in which the Apostles (or their successors) put their hands on the head of the one chosen to be ordained and a prayer is said asking God to send the Holy Spirit to the candidate.² (CCC 1572) In this case these men were ordained, that is, they were set apart and had the “laying on of hands,” not for the priesthood but for the ministry, a special work subordinate to the Apostles.⁵ Even today at the ordination to the diaconate only the bishop lays hands on the candidate, thus signifying the deacon’s special attachment to the bishop in the tasks of his service.² (CCC 1569) The word, “deacon” comes from the Greek “to serve.” Today, deacons assist the bishop and priests in the celebration of the divine mysteries, above all the Eucharist, in the distribution of Holy Communion, in assisting at and blessing marriages, in baptizing, in the proclamation of the Gospel and preaching, in presiding over funerals, and in dedicating themselves to the various ministries of charity.² (CCC 1570)

7The 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. The priestly class in Jerusalem was a vast and in many ways marginalized population. Estimates of numbers are always difficult, but there were probably many thousands of persons in this category.³ Converts came from the priestly ranks of the Sadducees, who formed the Temple establishment and possibly, too, from an Essene group of priests who lived in the southwestern quarter of Jerusalem.¹²

1 Peter 2: 4-9

As we continue to reflect on the meaning of baptism, this passage sets forth the nature and function of the Church which we join when we are baptized.¹⁴ The old Temple in Jerusalem was built out of ordinary dead stones but this reading makes it clear that Christians must be the living material from which the new Temple of God is formed.¹⁵

Beloved:

4Come to him, a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God, Peter invites us to join ourselves to Christ, a living stone, rejected by men--but approved by God--because of his death and resurrection.⁸

5and, like living stones, let yourselves be built Jesus is our cornerstone, and upon that stone he has built a human temple of living saints. We do good things because of the goodness that is within us. That goodness is the presence of the Holy Spirit which empowers us to reach out and bring our brothers and sisters out of the darkness and into the light.¹⁵ Peter invites us to allow ourselves to be used by God in a spiritual house of God’s design. Letting God shape us is basic to spiritual growth; it requires submission to God’s will. **into a spiritual house** The worship “in Spirit and in truth” of the New Covenant is not tied exclusively to any one place. What matters above all is that, when the faithful assemble in the same place, they are the “living stones,” gathered to be “built into a spiritual house.”² (CCC 1179) **to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.** With Christ as our High Priest, ALL OF THE BAPTIZED share in the COMMON PRIESTHOOD of the faithful where we are called to live a life according to the Spirit. The ordained priesthood has a special leadership role, but all believers have a priestly function for the

whole church is called to give praise to God and to offer sacrifice.¹⁴ The Second Vatican Council says that “all our works, prayers and apostolic undertakings, family and married life, daily work, relaxation of mind and body, if they are accomplished in the Spirit—indeed even hardships of life if patiently borne—all these become SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. In the celebration of the Eucharist these may most fittingly be offered to the Father ALONG WITH the Body of the Lord. And so, worshipping everywhere by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself to God.”² (CCC 901)

One way to do this is to say the “Morning Offering.”

O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer You all of my prayers, works, joys and sufferings of this day for all the intentions of Your Sacred Heart, in union with the holy sacrifice of the mass throughout the world, in reparation for all my sins, for the intentions of all of my associates, and in particular for the intentions recommended by the Holy Father for this month.

6For it says in Scripture This is from Is 28:16: Behold, I am laying a stone in Zion, a cornerstone, The cornerstone is the stone at the base that binds two walls together and is chosen for its size. It supports the entire structure. This cornerstone is Jesus Christ who is a rock solid foundation for those who believe. The prophets and apostles are the foundation and the faithful themselves are the living stones of the edifice.¹⁶ chosen and precious, and whoever believes in it shall not be put to shame.

7Therefore, its value is for you who have faith, but for those without faith: The stone that the builders rejected Later, in acts 4:10-11, Peter preaches before the Sanhedrin that Jesus himself was the stone rejected by the members of the Sanhedrin when they crucified him.¹³ has become the cornerstone, Originally this was a reference in Psalm 118 to the nation of Israel itself which was flung aside as useless by the powers of the world but God destined it for the most honorable place in the building of His Kingdom. Jesus took these words and applied them to himself. It looked like he had been utterly rejected by men but in the purpose of God, he was the cornerstone of the Kingdom, honored above all.⁶

8and a stone that will make people stumble, and a rock that will make them fall. This reminds us of the words of Simeon at the Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple: “This child is destined to be the downfall and the rise of many in Israel, a sign that will be opposed.”(Luke 2:34) They stumble by disobeying the word, The ones who disobey the word are the ones who will stumble and fall. It is as true for us as it was for them. To those who accept Him, Jesus is Savior and Friend; to those who reject him, he is judgment and condemnation.⁶ as is their destiny. This does NOT mean that God predestined some to damnation for he wants all men to be saved. However, man can oppose God’s plan and reject grace.⁷

9You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, These are titles applied to Israel in the Old Testament but especially on a promise that Yahweh made to Moses when the people arrived at the foot of Mt. Sinai. It is only now completely fulfilled because through their constant rebellion Israel failed to receive all that God wished to give them. These four titles for Israel are now applied to the Christian Community: Chosen Race, Royal Priesthood, Holy Nation, and People of God’s Own. As a result, we are marked for the service of God.⁸ so that you may

announce the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. This darkness is the element of evil and disorder. Light is the element of God and of moral good.¹⁶

John 14: 1-12

This Gospel is from the discourse at the Last Supper. Jesus has just told the disciples that he will not be with them much longer.¹⁴

Jesus said to his disciples:

1“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Jesus wants to protect his disciples from despair at his death and from discouragement when persecution comes their way.⁹ You have faith in God; have faith also in me.

2In my Father’s house The “Father’s house” is heaven. Sin has exiled us from this, our homeland.² (CCC 2795) Consider this reading in the light of marriage festivities in the time of Jesus. Should the betrothed be sad or troubled when the groom is going to prepare a home for her? In Jesus’ time the groom left his betrothed at her house to prepare a home for her in his city. He would prepare the feast and home for his bride and then come, usually at night, to take his bride to the wedding at his house.¹⁸ there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? Jesus has just reassured them that there is ample room in this house of the Father where he will be. Therefore, they need have no fear that he will fail to find a place for them in his company.⁸ Jesus is also preparing his followers for his Ascension into heaven, which will take place in a week and a half.

3And 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. The return that Jesus refers to includes his Second Coming at the end of the world, and his meeting with each soul after death.¹⁷ This could also refer to Christ’s invisible return through the Spirit.¹²

4Where I am going you know the way.” Jesus has repeatedly told them that he is going to the Father and that the way is through his sacrificial death which is in turn the model that all must take who would follow him.⁸ “The Way” is also a designation of Christianity in Acts.¹²

5Thomas said to him, “Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?” Thomas shows the ignorance of all the disciples and how little they as yet understand.⁸

6Jesus said to him, “I am the way and the truth and the life. St. Francis de Sales tells us that Jesus is the way to the Father through what he teaches, for by keeping to this teaching we will reach heaven; through faith, which he inspires; through his example, since no one can go to the Father without imitating the Son; through his merits, which make it possible for us to enter our heavenly home; and above all he is the way because he reveals the Father, with whom he is one because of his divine nature.¹⁷ No one comes to the Father except through me. Left to its own natural powers humanity does not have access to the “Father’s house,” to God’s life and happiness. Only Christ can open to man such access that we, his members, might have confidence that we too shall go where he, our Head and our Source, has preceded us.² (CCC 661) Here Jesus claims to be the sole Savior of the world! He is the one mediator chosen by the Father to bring the human family to glory.⁹ Note that the path is open to everyone and there are no preconditions except turning from sin to the one true God. We should be profoundly grateful to God for providing a way out of the sinful condition that besets every human being.¹⁰

⁷If you know me, then you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” With the glorification of Christ and the coming of the Spirit their understanding will be made perfect.⁸

⁸Philip said to him, “Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.”

⁹Jesus 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. Those who can “see” are those who believe. Those who either cannot or will not see that Jesus reveals the Father are those who do not believe.¹³ How can you say, ‘Show us the father’? Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God.⁹ His whole earthly life—his words and deeds, his silences and sufferings, indeed his manner of being and speaking—is Revelation of the Father.² (CCC 516)

¹⁰Do 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.

¹¹Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, In receiving Christ, the Christian receives the Godhead whole and entire.⁸ or else, believe because of the works themselves.

¹²Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, This refers first and foremost to the Church as possessing and continuing Christ’s divine power for salvation.⁸ and will do greater ones than these, This does not refer only to miracles, which will continue, but to the far greater scope, geographically and numerically, within which the Church will exercise its salvific or saving power.⁸ because I am going to the Father.”

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “The Twelve: The Lives of the Apostles After Calvary” by C. Bernard Ruffin, (2) “The Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (3) “The Acts of the Apostles” by Luke Timothy Johnson, (4) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: The Acts Of The Apostles” by William S. Kurz, S.J., (5) “The Navarre Bible: Acts Of The Apostles,” (6) “The Letters Of James And Peter” by William Barclay, (7) “The Navarre Bible: Catholic Epistles,” (8) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (9) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of John” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (10) “Jewish New Testament Commentary” by David H. Stern, (11) “Understanding The Scriptures” by Scott Hahn, (12) The St. Paul Center For Biblical Theology Online founded by Dr. Scott Hahn, (13) “Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers” by James L. Weaver, (14) “Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers” by Lawrence E. Mick, (15) “The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken e³ Marie Finn, (16) “Dictionary of the Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (17) “The Navarre Bible: St John”, and (18) “The Gospel of St. John” by Stephen K. Ray.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.