**Lesson 7**

**Acts 6: The Deacons and the Accusations Against Stephen**

*In last week’s lesson we saw that not all members of the Jewish-Christian community wholeheartedly embraced the spirit of giving and sharing. Ananias and Sapphira sold some of their land and gave a portion of the proceeds to the Apostles while claiming they had given* ***all*** *of the proceeds. Their hearts were not with the Holy Spirit, but were full of pride and the need for prestige. Their lies to God caused their death. We also saw that the Apostles continued to preach the Word and taught as Jesus had taught. They were again arrested. A wise man named Gamaliel cautioned against doing harm to the Apostles just in case they were men from God.*

1. **When did you feel closest to God this week? Was there a particular verse or lesson from Acts 6 that you found particularly inspiring?**
2. **What was causing this Jewish-Christian community to grow in numbers?**

**See Acts 2:40-41, Acts 4:4, Acts 5:12-14 and Acts 6:1.**

**Acts 2:40-4140**He testified with many other arguments, and was exhorting them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” **41**Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand persons were added that day.

**Acts 4:4** **4**But many of those who heard the word came to believe and [the] number of men grew to [about] five thousand.

**Acts 5:12-1412**Many signs and wonders were done among the people at the hands of the apostles. They were all together in Solomon’s portico. **13**None of the others dared to join them, but the people esteemed them. **14**Yet more than ever, believers in the Lord, great numbers of men and women, were added to them.

**Acts 6:11**[At that time, as the number of disciples continued to grow, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

1. **Check your Bible for foot notes on the phrase “serve at table”. With what types of tasks did the Apostles need help with when the number of followers began growing?**

**See Acts 6:1-4.**

**6:1-41**At that time, as the number of disciples continued to grow, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. **2**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. **3**Brothers, select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint to this task, **4**whereas we shall devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

1. **Many people believe these passages reflect the beginning of a hierarchy in leadership of the Church. The seven men chosen to serve others are similar to the deacons in the Church today.**

**What is the role of the Apostles in these early communities?**

**What was the role of the “deacons” or the seven men chosen to serve? See Acts 6:2-4 above and Acts 6:8-10.**

**Acts 6:8-10 8**Now Stephen, filled with grace and power, was working great wonders and signs among the people. **9**Certain members of the so-called Synagogue of Freedmen, Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and people from Cilicia and Asia, came forward and debated with Stephen, **10**but they could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke.

1. **What is the role of deacons in the Catholic Church today? See the Catechism references #1569, 1570, and 1596.**

**CCC 1569** "At a lower level of the hierarchy are to be found deacons, who receive the imposition of hands 'not unto the priesthood, but unto the ministry."'53 At an 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 "diakonia."54

**CCC 1570** Deacons share in Christ's mission and grace in a special way.55 The sacrament of Holy Orders marks them with an *imprint*("character") which cannot be removed and which configures them to Christ, who made himself the "deacon" or servant of all.56 Among other tasks, it is the task of deacons to 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 the proclamation of the Gospel and preaching, in presiding over funerals, and in dedicating themselves to the various ministries of charity.57

**CCC 1596** Deacons are ministers ordained for tasks of service of the Church; they do not receive the ministerial priesthood, but ordination confers on them important functions in the ministry of the word, divine worship, pastoral governance, and the service of charity, tasks which they must carry out under the pastoral authority of their bishop.

1. **Why is there a mention of “widows” as a concern in this community? Reflect on the problems that widows and orphans might have in the first century and today. Also see Deuteronomy 10:17-19, Deuteronomy 14:28-29, Psalm 68:5-7 and Exodus 22:20-23.**

**Deuteronomy 10:17-1917**For the Lord, your God, is the God of gods, the Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who has no favorites, accepts no bribes, **18**who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and loves the resident alien, giving them food and clothing. **19**So you too should love the resident alien, for that is what you were in the land of Egypt.

**Deuteronomy 14:28-29 28**At the end of every third year you shall bring out all the tithes of your produce for that year and deposit them within your own communities, **29**that the Levite who has no hereditary portion with you, and also the resident alien, the orphan and the widow within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied; so that the Lord, your God, may bless you in all that you undertake.

**Psalm 68:5-7**

Sing to God, praise his name; exalt the rider of the clouds.[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+68&version=NABRE#fen-NABRE-17020c)]  
Rejoice before him whose name is the Lord.  
**6**Father of the fatherless, defender of widows—God in his holy abode,  
**7**God gives a home to the forsaken, who leads prisoners out to prosperity,  
    while rebels live in the desert.

**Exodus 22:20-2320**You shall not oppress or afflict a resident alien, for you were once aliens residing in the land of Egypt. **21**You shall not wrong any widow or orphan. **22**If ever you wrong them and they cry out to me, I will surely listen to their cry. **23**My wrath will flare up, and I will kill you with the sword; then your own wives will be widows, and your children orphans.

1. **It appears that witnesses were encouraged to lie or exaggerate, before the Court as to the content of Stephen’s teaching. Why is offering false testimony such a serious sin? See Deuteronomy 5:20 and Leviticus 24:13-16.**

**Deuteronomy 5:20 (The Ten Commandments)** You shall not bear dishonest witness against your neighbor.

**Leviticus 24:13-16** **13**The Lord then said to Moses: **14**Take the blasphemer outside the camp, and when all who heard him have laid their handson his head, let the whole community stone him. **15**Tell the Israelites: Anyone who blasphemes God shall bear the penalty; **16**whoever utters the name of the Lord in a curse shall be put to death. The whole community shall stone that person; alien and native-born alike must be put to death for uttering the Lord’s name in a curse.

1. **How is Stephen described in this chapter? See Acts 6: 3, 8, 10, 13 and 15. Compare to Moses’ face in Exodus 35:29, 34, 35.**

**Have you even met or known someone whose very countenance suggests a person “filled with the Spirit”?**

**Acts 6:13-15 13**They presented false witnesses[[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+6&version=NABRE#fen-NABRE-31434f)] who testified, “This man never stops saying things against [this] holy place and the law. **14**For we have heard him claim that this Jesus the Nazorean will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us.” **15**All those who sat in the Sanhedrin looked intently at him and saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

**Exodus 35:2929**When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord.

**Exodus 35:34b-35** And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, **35**they saw that his face was radiant.

1. **Could there have been some truth in the claims against Stephen’s teachings? See Acts 6:14 above, and John 2:13-22**

**John 2:13-22 13**Since the Passover of the Jews was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. **14**He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, as well as the money-changers seated there. **15**He made a whip out of cords and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and oxen, and spilled the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables, **16**and to those who sold doves he said, “Take these out of here, and stop making my Father’s house a marketplace.” **17**His disciples recalled the words of scripture, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” **18**At this the Jews answered and said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” **19**Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” **20**The Jews said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?” **21**But he was speaking about the temple of his body. **22**Therefore, when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they came to believe the scripture and the word Jesus had spoken.