

The result

What happens in the end when the people listen to the Apostles and act according to their indications? It is impressive that when everything ends and the seven Deacons are designated, nowhere is there any more talk about the problem which led to their designation. The text itself of the Acts nowhere mentions that the problem was solved of the just handling of the rations and the equal honor to everyone of the Church's providential offering. On the contrary, as a result of the whole problem and its solution in a godly manner, it mentions: "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem". The Church was growing stronger every day with the enlistment in her of many people, who believed and were being baptized. Not because the Apostles, having been delivered of earthly cares and strivings, had given themselves completely to their mission. Nor because all seven Deacons were preaching both with the word and with their ministry. But because everything was being done in a godly manner and consequently His blessing as predominant, brought about not only the solution of the problems, but also the prospering of the Church's work.

My brethren, we all have problems. And we all try in various ways and means to deal with them. People, in olden times, before their every action used to say, "God first"! Let us learn in our every action to put His will forward, so that His blessing predominates in our life.

Archim. I. N.

SUNDAY, APRIL 26, 2015, *Sunday of the Myrrh-Bearing Women, Hieromartyr Basil of Amaseia, Glaphyra the Righteous*

tone of the week: Second Tone, Eothinon - Fourth Eothinon

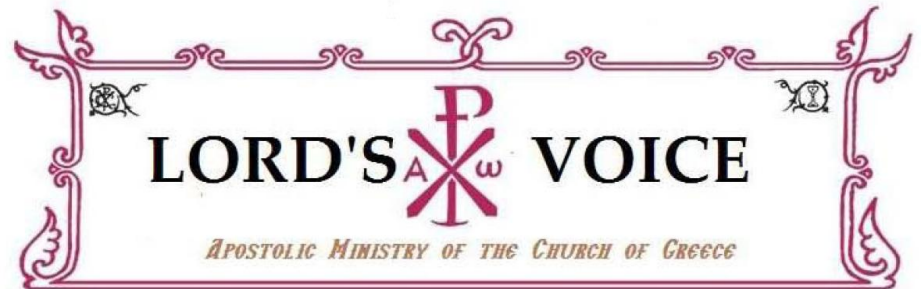
EPISTLE *Acts of the Apostles 6:1-7*

GOSPEL *Mark 15:43-47; 16:1-8*

NEXT SUNDAY, MAY 3, 2015, *Sunday of the Paralytic, The Holy Martyrs Timothy and Maura, Peter the Wonderworker, Xenia of Kalamata the Great Martyr*

EPISTLE *Acts of the Apostles 9:32-42*

GOSPEL *John 5:1-15*



63rd Year

April 26, 2015

Pamphlet # 17 (3230)

THE WORD OF GOD INCREASED

Today's Epistle passage comes to indicate a problem from the life of the first Church. And it does it in a straight and objective manner, without beautifying or "rounding out" the situation, presenting the human inexpediency in all its majesty. And it does it, not in order to strictly judge, or to render blame. It documents the event, in order to show through the Apostles' spiritual reaction yet once more, that in the end, whatever happens, Christ is directing His Church, so that the salvation of the human race and its right to theosis and sanctification is secured.

The problem

Almost a life of common possessions had been achieved in the first Church. However what Luke documents that "everything was common to them" (Acts 4:32), the opponent devil envied and fought. Based on people's tendency to prefer those closer to them even among brethren, he caused a division. The reasonable complaint was expressed that the widows of the "Hellenizers", in other words, of the Greek speaking Christians, and who came from Jews who dwelt outside of Palestine, were being treated unjustly in the distribution of the daily ration, verses the "Jews", the Aramaic speaking Christians, who also were formerly Jews, but dwelt in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas. The problem is mentioned to

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 6:1-17

PROKEIMENON. MODE 2.

PSALM 117.14,18

The Lord is my strength and my song.

Verse: The Lord has chastened me sorely.

IN THOSE DAYS, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, "it is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And what they said pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochoros, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaos, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands upon them. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

the Apostles, who ascertaining the division, hasten to give a solution. However, they pose criteria for solving the problem, which at a first glance don't seem to be related to the conflict.

The criteria for acting

In order for the Apostles to act, they secured first that the work for which they were mainly called by the Lord Himself would not be hampered. "It is not pleasing for us having abandoned the word of God to serve tables". They are not putting down the ministry of the tables, which throughout time, in the

Church has the eminent place of the most basic work of doing good, as it also serves the disposition of the Christian possessors of wealth for them to dispose it for the common good, but it also covers the basic needs of life of the poorer ones, such that the commandment of love is fulfilled. They simply are indicating the aim of the Church's existence in the world. She exists in order to preach the word of truth and to serve the saving mysteries.

The second thing they pose, is for the Church herself to select whoever would undertake this particular ecclesiastical ministry with care. "Pick out from among you seven men of good repute" they say, in order to stress that they themselves who comprise the Church should select, not selecting superficially and casually, but following "visitation", that is following examination, care and attention. They don't cause a numerical selection, but a selection of quality! For this reason also they call for a strict previous examination and previous agreement before the designation.

The third thing they demand, is that whoever is selected should be "full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom". They also demand administrative and sanctifying gifts, that is humanly cultivated abilities and gifts of God. Both knowledge of skill and moral principles. Both capability and holiness!

Finally, they assure that the Apostles themselves will validate the selection and will establish whoever they indicate to them with the above criteria, in the ministry of the Church. And they do this for it to show that in the Church "one does not receive the honor unto himself, but called by God" (Heb. 5:4). No one in the Church is able to claim and receive, on his own, the honor of whatsoever ministry, even if pressures are developed for this in various ways. The Apostles and their successors, have the final word, as they have undertaken the burden of the essential responsibility before God and men.