

martyrly death but also with the prayer for the forgiveness of his murderers. "Lord, do not set this sin against them". Surely there is no brighter crown for such a god-loving ministry. Thus he who set out ministering "tables", "was perfected" nourishing with his sacrificial example and martyrly intercessions, not only the members of the Church, but also his persecutors.

With such "spiritual hosts" how could the "number of disciples not increase" and how could the "word of God not increase"? And the odd thing is, says the golden mouth of the Church, that this increase happened not before but after the appearance of the trials. They were not scandalized either by the threats and the persecutions from those outside the Church, nor by the murmurings of those within. And furthermore, these things occurred in Jerusalem, in the place where Christ was condemned and crucified. It is obvious that thus the word of the Lord was being verified: "When I am elevated, I will draw everyone to myself".

Archim. B. L

**SUNDAY, MAY 12, 2019 SUNDAY OF THE MYRRH-BEARING WOMEN** *Epiphanius, Bishop of Cyprus Germanos, Patriarch of Constantinople, Theodorus the Righteous of Cythera, Removal of the Sacred Relics of Saint Joachim "Papoulakis" of Vatopaidi*

**TONE OF THE WEEK :** *Second Tone*

**EOTHINON :** *Fourth Eothinon*

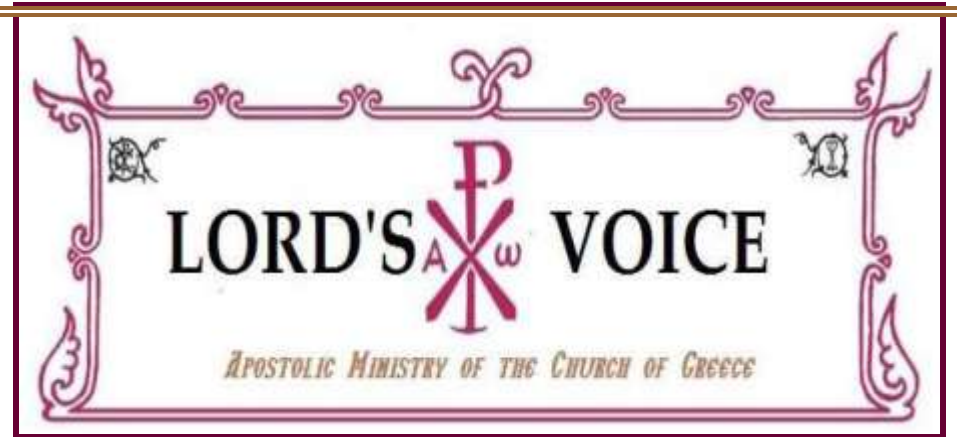
**EPISTLE READING:** *Acts of the Apostles 6:1-7*

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

**NEXT SUNDAY, MAY 19, 2019 SUNDAY OF THE PARALYTIC** *Patrick the Hieromartyr and Bishop of Prusa and His Fellow Martyrs Acacius, Menander, and Polyaeus, Our Righteous Father Memnonus the Wonderworker, Theotima & Kyriake the Martyrs*

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

**GOSPEL READING:** *John 5:1-15*



**67<sup>TH</sup> YEAR      MAY 12, 2019      PAMPHLET # 19 (3441)**

### **"BRIGHT FRUITS OF A TRIAL"**

Our people, so as to not be discouraged when a difficulty appears, says the optimistic phrase: "every obstacle is for the good". Say Paisios the Haghiorite said even more successfully: "Wherever the devil plows, God sews." And naturally, the more fertile the field is, all the more fruits it will make. Obviously the "field" of the first Church was quite fertile. Thus, with the first "plowing" of the devil, the "good farmers", the holy Apostles managed to sew a rich sewing, which gave a rich fruit bearing. The unpleasant thing is that the troubling plowing, to which today's Epistle Reading refers, happened from within and not from outside of the Church. The Greek speaking Jewish Christians who were from foreign lands, began protesting against the local Jewish Christians who were speaking Aramaic, because they were neglecting the widows of the former, in the daily distribution of the foods and charities. According to the sacred Chrysostom, this dysfunction probably was not due to an evil disposition but to a lethargy of those handling it. The prudent facing of the problem by the holy Apostles brought the following bright fruits:

## ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 6:1-7

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.

### God-taught priorities

1, It showed forth the priority of prayer and of the preaching work of the Church as regards "serving tables" and more generally the so-called "social offering". With prayer we are speaking to God and with preaching God is speaking to us. This two way communication with God is the center of the life of the Church. It is a priority, which Christ repeatedly stressed. He scolded the distraction of Martha "concerning much service" and praised Mary, who chose the "good portion", hearing His words. Those who sought Him merely because they ate "of the breads and were satiated" received a similar "cold shower". He exhorted them to work not the "food unto perdition" but "the one that remains unto eternal life" (Jn. 6:26) in other words, His Gospel.

He disappointed all those who preferred Him as a "minister of Social Care" wretchedly and He made them depart, running, revealing to them, harsh (Jn. 6:60) or at least strange truths for them. In other words, that He is the "living bread having descended from heaven",

that this Bread is His Flesh and that whoever does not eat His Flesh and does not drink His Blood is not able to have life in him. Following these orders of the Lord, the holy Apostles judged that they should not leave the worship and the preaching, in order to be occupied with the rations. So for this reason, they suggested to the believers that they select seven blameless persons, full of prudence, but also deep piety, in order to undertake this ministry.

### "The clergymen not lording it over"

2, The implementation of the "democratic" measure is the second fruit of the correct handling of the problem that appeared. In an age when the models of governing are totalitarian, even in religious communities, the suggestion of the Apostles clearly comprises, if not anything else, a blaring innovation. The preeminent Apostle Peter will present the spirit of his pastoral care, in writing, urging in his First Catholic Epistle to the presbyters: "pastor the flock that God entrusted to you without oppressing the believers, but you become models of virtue, worthy of imitation... And keep humblemindedness so well, as if you have buttoned it on you.... (1 Peter 5:3). With such a humble train of thought, but also much discretion, the Apostles entrust the opinion and the vote of their flock for such an important choice, preserving their own validity unoffended before every criticism for biasness, according to the Golden-tongued John.

### The Seven and the chief

3, Naturally the most tangible fruits of the prudent handling of the aforementioned murmuring, are the persons themselves of the chosen seven Deacons, with chief being the later Protomartyr Saint Stephen, "a man of full of faith and the Holy Spirit". The term "deacons" does not have the meaning of today's first degree of the priesthood. They were appointed initially for the specific philanthropic ministry, but later on they were substituting for the Apostles also in the spiritual work of the ministry of the word.

In this ministry, Saint Stephen also took the first place. The fanatics of the synagogue, who went to repel his teaching, did not manage to stand against his wisdom. But also his defense, when they captured him, comprises a monument of the preaching word and a bold witness of the faith. Furthermore, Saint Stephen was granted – imitating the preached Christ – to seal his final sermon not only with a