



73rd Year

May 4, 2025

Pamphlet #18 (3753)

THE SUNDAY EPISTLE (Acts 6:1-7)

The number of the disciples multiplied greatly

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 MYSTERY OF THE PRIESTHOOD

Scenes from the organization of the first Church of Jerusalem are presented in today's Epistle reading. The growth in the number of its members led to additional needs in the ministry of the Body of Christ. For this reason, the Lord's disciples

decided to focus themselves on worship and divine preaching, while asking the Church body to select seven men "full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3) to undertake broader ministerial duties in the Church. The men selected were formally assigned to this new ministry through the "laying on of hands" by the Holy Apostles and the invocation of the Holy Spirit.

How ordination was instituted

The sacrament of priesthood or ordination was established by Christ Himself, as were all the sacraments of our Church. He was the one who chose His Holy Apostles and endowed them with the spiritual power and authority to perform great and supernatural mysteries in His name, with the purpose of spiritually guiding people toward salvation.

Subsequently, after Pentecost, the Apostles, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, appointed bishops, presbyters, and deacons within the ever-growing ecclesiastical community. Bishops ordained their successors, thereby creating a sacred noetic chain, which connects throughout time and up to our days all the canonical and Orthodox liturgists of God's mysteries.

Priesthood, the fruit of divine love

Priesthood is not given by God as a reward for holiness or worthiness of men, but it is the fruit of divine love and condescension, which continually cares for the service of the Body of Christ. It is the highest and most significant attribute that a person can acquire, by the grace of God, which cannot be compared with any worldly office, no matter how high it may be.

Saint John Chrysostom says: "The boundaries of the kingdom are one thing, and the boundaries of the priesthood are another. But the priesthood is greater than the kingdom... The king governs bodies, while the priest serves souls..." The related teaching of Saint Cosmas the Aetolian is well known, according to which the spiritual authority of the priest is not possessed even

by the Angels: "If you see an angel and a priest, you should first venerate the priest, because he performs the bloodless sacrifice of Christ, to which even the angels bow and observe with ecstasy."

The mission of the priest

The simple and plain words of Saint Cosmas the Aetolian are the most instructive concerning the importance of the priesthood. Using images from daily life, he addresses the priest and says: "The shepherd surrounds his sheep. Similarly, you, the priest, have a duty to visit the homes of Christians day and night, not to eat and drink or take their belongings, but to reflect on which man is at odds with his wife, which father with his child, which brother with his brother, which neighbor with his neighbor? You must bring them into love. This is the priest's duty, to lay down your life and head for the Christians." In just a few lines, the Saint describes the social and spiritual mission of the priest, who "is not a man, but the sacrifice of a man, which is added to the sacrifice of God. And this is priesthood."

Pray, brothers, for our clergy, just as they continuously pray for the entire congregation of the Church. Pray that they always draw the grace of God upon themselves so that they may fulfill their sacred mission, overcoming their weaknesses and passions. May they worthily continue the profound priestly tradition of their holy predecessors, working for the glory of Christ and His Church. Amen!

Archimandrite E. Oik.

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May 4, 2025: 3rd Sunday of Pascha, of the Holy Myrrh-Bearing Women, as well as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, the night disciple. Martyr Pelagia (+290), Saint Hilarion the monk.

2nd Tone – Eothinon: 4 – Epistle: Acts 6:1-7 – Gospel: Mark 15:43-16:8

NEXT SUNDAY: May 11, Sunday of the Paralytic
Epistle: Acts 9:32-42 – Gospel: John 5:1-15

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