

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES CHAPTER 6:1 – 7:60

THE SITUATION WITH THE WIDOWS

- “Were especially vulnerable in ancient society and depended on the assistance of others for their livelihood” (Footnote ICSB 6:1-6)
- There were a great number of widows in Jerusalem. It was the custom for Jews from the Diaspora to return to Jerusalem in their old age to die in the land of their ancestors. (Agape Bible Study AA 3 6:1-6)
- When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year, which is the year of tithing, giving it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and **the widow** (Deut 26:12)
- Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and **widows** in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. (James 1:27)
- Here we see the Church at its earliest stages living out Christ’s ordinance: ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’ (Mt 25:40)

6:2: “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.

- Note the emphasis on the special distinction of the twelve still.
 - o The hierarchical nature of the Church is present from the beginning
 - o “summoned the body of the disciples”(6:2)
- Why wasn’t it proper for them to do these menial tasks?
 - o Prayer and ministry of the word (6:4)

6:6: These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands upon them.

- And the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and **lay your hand upon him**; cause him to stand before Elea’zar the priest and all the congregation, and you shall commission him in their sight. **You shall invest him with some of your authority**, that all the congregation of the people of Israel may obey. And he shall stand before Elea’zar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD; at his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the people of Israel with him, the whole congregation.” And Moses did as the LORD commanded him; he took Joshua and caused him to stand before Elea’zar the priest and the whole congregation, **and he laid his hands upon him**, and commissioned him as the LORD directed through Moses. (Num 27: 18-23)
- Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the elders laid their hands upon you. (1 Tim 4:14)
- Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor participate in another man’s sins; keep yourself pure. (1 Tim 5:22)

6:7: 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 SIMILARITIES BETWEEN STEPHEN AND CHRIST

STEPHEN IN ACTS	JESUS
And Stephen, full of <u>grace and power</u> , did great wonders and signs among the people. (7:8)	My <u>grace</u> is sufficient for you, for my <u>power</u> is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor 12:9) Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst (Acts 2:22)
But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke (7:10) ***REMEMBER LUKE 21:15*** <i>...for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.</i>	He came to His hometown and began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers (Mt 13:54) And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. (Luke 2:47) And they were astonished at his teaching, (Mk 1:22) No one ever spoke the way this man does (Jn 7:46)
Then they secretly instigated men (7:11)	Now the chief priests and the whole council sought false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death (Mt 26:59)
We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God (7:11)	Then the high priest tore his robes, and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy." (Mt 26:65)
And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, (7:12)	Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Ca'ia'phas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered. (Mt 26:57)
And set up false witnesses (7:13)	many false witnesses came forward. (Mt 26:60)
who said, "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law; ¹⁴ for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us." 7:13-14)	At last two came forward and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.'" (Mt 26:60-61)
Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God (7:56)	Hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven (Mt 26:64)
Then he fell to his knees and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them (7:60)	Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34)
As they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (7:59)	Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46)

WHY IS LUKE SO INTENTIONALLY MAKING THIS COMPARISON???

STEPHEN'S SPEECH TO THE COUNCIL

- It is the first time a follower of Christ other than Peter speaks on his own in the Book of Acts.
- It is the longest speech in the Acts of the Apostles.
- Stephen's defense speech rehearses covenant history from Genesis to his own generation. (ICSB 7:1-53)
- Stephen has 5 discrepancies between what he states and what is found in the Hebrew Pentateuch
 - o The quote from Genesis 12:1 in Acts 7:3 refers to an event that took place after Abraham had settled in Haran and not before (Gen 11:31-12:1).
 - o Stephen says that Abraham did not leave for the Promised Land until after the death of his father which does not agree with the Hebrew text of Genesis 11:26, 32 and 12:4.
 - o Stephen says that 75 Israelites made the migration into Egypt, but Genesis records that there were 70, which includes Jacob, Joseph and his two sons (Gen 46:26-27) .
 - o In Acts 7:16 Stephen says that Jacob was buried at Shechem. However, Genesis 50:13 records that he was buried at Hebron in the cave Abraham purchased that was known as the tomb of Machpelah.
 - o Stephen says that the land for the tomb at Shechem was purchased by Abraham, but Genesis 33:19 and Joshua 24:32 attribute the purchase of the land at Shechem to Abraham's grandson Jacob. (Agape Bible Study AA Chapter 4)
- He stresses that much of the story of Israel is a story of stubborn rebellion, highlighting the rejection of:
 - o Joseph
 - And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him (7:9)
 - o Moses
 - But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' At this retort Moses fled, and became an exile in the land of Mid'ian, where he became the father of two sons. (7:27-29)
 - o The Law
 - you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it." (7:53)
 - o The Prophets
 - you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it." (7:52)
 - o Jesus
 - And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, (7:52)
- The biblical figures he mentions are also important because they are now being seen in the light of the divine plan. They are reading the Old Testament through the lens of Christ:
 - o Joseph, Moses and Jesus were both rejected by their kinsmen, rescued by God, made redeemers of the family of Israel

- He is critical of the Temple, and Jerusalem as the House of God
 - o But it was Solomon who built a house for him. Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands; (7:47-48)
 - See (7:41): And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and rejoiced in the works of their hands.
 - o Places other than Jerusalem in which God worked among his people
 - Mesopotamia (7:2), Haran (7:4), Egypt (7:9), Midian (7:29), Mt. Sinai (7:30), The Red Sea (7:36).

7:60: And when he had said this he fell asleep. (The Christian term for earthly death)

- After that, he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. (1 Cor 15:6)
- Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.(1 Cor 15:18)
- We do not want you to be unaware, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. (1 Thes 4:13)
- Indeed, we tell you this, on the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord,* will surely not precede those who have fallen asleep. (1 Thes 4:15)
- From the time when our ancestors fell asleep, everything has remained as it was from the beginning of creation." (2 Peter 3:4)

THE DIACONATE IN THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

"The divinely instituted ecclesiastical ministry is exercised in different degrees by those who even from ancient times have been called bishops, priests, and deacons." Catholic doctrine, expressed in the liturgy, the Magisterium, and the constant practice of the Church, recognizes that **there are two degrees of ministerial participation in the priesthood of Christ: the episcopacy and the presbyterate** . The diaconate is intended to help and serve them. For this reason the term *sacerdos* in current usage denotes bishops and priests but not deacons. Yet Catholic doctrine teaches that the degrees of priestly participation (episcopate and presbyterate) and the degree of service (diaconate) are all three conferred by a sacramental act called "ordination," that is, by the sacrament of Holy Orders (CCC 1554)

"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.'**" 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." (CCC 1569)

Deacons share in Christ's mission and grace in a special way. 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. 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. (CCC 1570)