

- In our first reading we see how quickly evil and strife can infiltrate even the Church...and it reminds us to be wary of such things.
- We read: “*As the number of disciples continued to grow, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.*”
- Now the “daily distribution” was food for poor widows who had no means of support.
- But what are the Hellenists and the Hebrews?
- Greek became the language of many nations in the Near East after Alexander’s conquest a few hundred years before Jesus.
- And Jews who lived outside of Israel therefore spoke Greek rather than Hebrew or Aramaic—the languages of Israel, and thus they were called Hellenists, or Greeks...and native Hebrews looked down on them.
- The word “Hellenist”, by the way, is from the name of Greece, called “Hellas”, which itself comes from the name of a Greek mythological warrior named Hellen (with two l’s, not Helen of Troy), whose sons supposedly were fathers of the Greek tribes.
- It’s very similar to Israel being named after the man Israel...and the people being called *Israelites* in the past, and *Israelis* even today.
- And as Hellenist Jews made pilgrimages to Jerusalem, many joined the new Christian religion.
- But...people being people...the native Hebrews looked down on the Hellenists and did not attend to their widows.
- Pride and arrogance, and prejudice...already worming their way into the new Church which was based on love and charity...and they have been present in the Church ever since.

- Now the apostles had more important things to do than sort out squabbles, so they had the community pick out seven men to ensure equity in the distribution.
- All of the men chosen have Greek names...indicating that they were chosen from among the Hellenists...so that they could care for their own.
- And the apostles “*laid hands on them*”...*ordained* them...not primarily for preaching, but for the service of the community. And this remains deacons’ primary role even today.
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- Now St. Peter in our second reading focuses on an extremely important, but often taken for granted, aspect of our faith: and that is priesthood.
- Not the ordained priesthood, but rather the *common*, or “*baptismal*”, priesthood of Christians—a gift from God through baptism itself.
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- We take baptism way too much for granted...very often worrying more about a “photo shoot” for the child (“Isn’t my baby oh-so-cute”) rather than adequately acknowledging the marvelous transformation that baptism works—a birth from death into spiritual life with Christ and communion with God.
- For Jesus said, “*Truly...I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*” (John 3:5-6 RSV)
- Jesus is forever the high priest...but those who are baptized in Christ are consecrated into participation IN that one eternal priesthood of Christ.
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- And what is the function of a priest?

- Priests offer sacrifice and worship to God—for himself and for the people...sacrifice in thanksgiving for gifts received...and also for reparation for offenses against God and man—our “sins”.
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- Now the Jewish sacrifices of animals and crops were but a *foreshadowing* of the perfect and eternal sacrifice of Christ on the cross.
- The letter to the Hebrews--one of the most overlooked books in the Bible for its depth and importance--speaks profoundly of this:
- “...it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.” (Heb 10:4 RSV)
- And then it says: “...when Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure...**we** have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all...for all time a single sacrifice for sins...For by [it] he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.” (Heb 10:5-14 RSV)
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- Our participation in the Sunday Mass and in the Eucharist **is** our participation in that perfect sacrifice of Christ.
- Through this sacrifice we present perfect worship to God...asking Him to forgive our faults, rendering him worthy thanksgiving, and obtaining the wisdom and strength necessary for us to live the lives He calls us to live.
- But we cannot offer this sacrifice if we aren’t here.
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- If your pastor/priest did not to show up for Mass on Sundays...if he did not care whether Mass was celebrated—you would **rightly**

be outraged, accuse him of dereliction of duty, and denounce him to the archbishop.

- Then why, O Christian...you so privileged to share in this sacrifice of sacrifice for the praise of God and the forgiveness of sins...you who share in the baptismal priesthood of all the faithful and in the priesthood of Christ—why do you believe that your absence or irreverence goes unnoticed?
- The saints and angels—the great cloud of witnesses of martyrs who died for the faith—weep that such a holy sacrifice is so neglected.
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- Many people say (to get out of going to Church and Mass on Sundays): “*Well...I can pray to God on my own!*”
- That is, of course, true...but my first question is: “*Do you? Or do you even think of God on Sundays if you don't go to Church?*”
- Cain also prayed on his own...but because he did not offer sacrifice that was pleasing to God, he was not heard and, as scripture puts it: “*...for Cain and his offering [God] had no regard.*” (Gen 4:5 RSV). His sacrifice was rejected because his prayer and sacrifice was not what God wanted of him.
- Yes...DO offer your charitable works and prayers...the works of your daily married and family life, your daily occupations, and even the hardships of life...to God.
- But do not neglect this duty and privilege in the Mass.
- One Mass is greater in merit than all other prayers and sacrifices you will or can do in your lifetime...because each Mass is united with Jesus' own infinite sacrifice on the Cross.
- And God has called his people to weekly communal worship since at least the time of Moses.

- Jesus tells us: "*For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.*" (Mat 18:20)
- So, as the letter to the Hebrews urges us: "*...let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another...*" (Heb 10:24-25 RSV)
- Exercise this great privilege and honor of your baptismal priesthood—at least weekly, but even at daily Mass if possible.
- And as God said to the Israelites...repeated in our letter from Peter today: "*I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself...if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples...and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*" (Exo 19:3-6 RSV)...to bask in the glow of God's love...not only in this life, but forever.

[Acts 6:1-7](#)

As the number of disciples continued to grow,  
the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews  
because their widows  
were being neglected in the daily distribution.

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.

Brothers, select from among you seven reputable men,  
filled with the Spirit and wisdom,  
whom we shall appoint to this task,  
whereas we shall devote ourselves to prayer  
and to the ministry of the word.”

The proposal was acceptable to the whole community,  
so they chose Stephen, a man filled with faith and the Holy Spirit,  
also Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas,  
and Nicholas of Antioch, a convert to Judaism.

They presented these men to the apostles  
who prayed and laid hands on them.

The word of God continued to spread,  
and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly;  
even a large group of priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

[Ps 33:1-2, 4-5, 18-19](#)

**Responsorial Psalm**

**R. (22) Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.**

or:

**R. Alleluia.**

Exult, you just, in the LORD;  
praise from the upright is fitting.  
Give thanks to the LORD on the harp;  
with the ten-stringed lyre chant his praises.

**R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.**

or:

**R. Alleluia.**

Upright is the word of the LORD,  
and all his works are trustworthy.  
He loves justice and right;  
of the kindness of the LORD the earth is full.

**R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.**

or:

**R. Alleluia.**

See, the eyes of the LORD are upon those who fear him,  
upon those who hope for his kindness,

To deliver them from death  
and preserve them in spite of famine.

**R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.**

or:

**R. Alleluia.**

[1 Pt 2:4-9](#)

## Reading 2

Beloved:

Come to him, a living stone, rejected by human beings  
but chosen and precious in the sight of God,  
and, like living stones,

let yourselves be built into a spiritual house  
to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices  
acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

For it says in Scripture:

*Behold, I am laying a stone in Zion,  
a cornerstone, chosen and precious,  
and whoever believes in it shall not be put to shame.*

Therefore, its value is for you who have faith, but for those without faith:

*The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone, and  
A stone that will make people stumble,  
and a rock that will make them fall.*

They stumble by disobeying the word, as is their destiny.

You are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood,  
a holy nation, a people of his own,  
so that you may announce the praises” of him  
who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

[Jn 14:1-12](#)

## Gospel

Jesus said to his disciples:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.

You have faith in God; have faith also in me.

In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.

If there were not,

would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?

And if I go and prepare a place for you,

I will come back again and take you to myself,  
so that where I am you also may be.

Where I am going you know the way.”

Thomas said to him,

“Master, we do not know where you are going;  
how can we know the way?”

Jesus said to him, I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me.

If you know me, then you will also know my Father.

From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

Philip said to him,

“Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.”

Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you for so long a time  
and you still do not know me, Philip?

Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.

How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?

The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own.

The Father who dwells in me is doing his works.

**Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me,  
or else, believe because of the works themselves.**

Amen, amen, I say to you,

whoever believes in me will do the works that I do,

and will do greater ones than these,

because I am going to the Father.”