

## **HOMILY FOR 5<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF EASTER, YEAR A**

**By Fr. Jerome Ituah, OCD**

**Readings: Acts 6;1-7; Ps 32(33); 1 Pet 2:4-9; Jn 14:1-12**

**Theme: Chosen for God's work in the world**

My maternal grandmother lived with us in the later part of her life. She was a woman of wisdom who accepted the Catholic faith and was baptised in her old age. Still, she was profoundly spiritual and lived out the Christian faith till she died in 1991. Whenever she was eating, all of us, the grandchildren, sat around her. By then, we had already eaten. We sat around her to receive a tiny piece of meat. Odede (granny in Esan), as we call her, would cut her piece of meat into the corresponding number of children sitting around her. She would say, 'Where there is love, there is always enough.' I recall these words today as I reflect on the first reading.

There was enough for everyone in the early Christian community led by the apostles because people sold their belongings and properties and put them at the feet of the apostles for the good of everyone in the community (Acts 4:34-37). Still, there was a problem. The human tendency to favour one's cronies and tribespeople. The problem was one of distribution. Understandably, the Christian community had grown and extended into the Gentile territories. Jews, who spoke Greek, called the Hellenists, joined the Christian community. But the Jews, who spoke Hebrew, discriminated against the Hellenists' widows in distributing the community's resources. The Hellenists cried out to the apostles. The apostles, leaders of the community, swiftly decided to resolve the conflict. They asked the people to set up a committee of seven men, chosen among themselves whom they trusted, men of good reputation and filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom. The assembly selected seven men, and they presented to the apostles for confirmation. The apostles prayed by laying hands on them. These men became the first deacons in the Church.

Some key points from this reading:

1. The Hellenists spoke out.
2. The apostles acted swiftly to their request.
3. The apostles did not impose their candidates. They allowed the assembly to choose the men they trusted.
4. The apostles did not want to be tied down with the ordinary task of distributing food, limiting them to service just within the community because they had a more significant task of preaching the good news to people outside the community.

The choice of the seven men leads us into the second reading. From chapter 1:13 of his first letter, Peter emphasises the need for a holy living to his addressees, the Christians. God has called them to be obedient children and to be holy, as He, God, is holy. For this reason, God chose them beforehand to be participants in the life of Christ, who has ransomed them from sin and death. In chapter two, Peter begins with the words, 'Put away all malice and deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander. Like newborn infants long for spiritual milk' to help them grow into salvation. Our reading takes off against this backdrop. 'As you come to him (that is, Jesus Christ), a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.' Christians must respond to Jesus Christ in a manner that defines them as people called, chosen and set apart by God for a unique purpose in life. Attached to Jesus, we each become a spiritual house where sacrifices, that is, prayers and good works, are offered for the world because we also share in the priesthood of Christ. The priest offers prayers and sacrifices on behalf of the people. We, too,

share in the common priesthood of Christ and are called to a life of prayer and good works as we see the apostles and the early Christian community doing.

In conclusion, Peter reminds his listeners that they are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession to proclaim God's works in the world because God has called them out of darkness into his marvellous light. Israel was the chosen people of God. But with Jesus, a new Israel emerged, cutting across race and nationality barriers. As Christians, we are the new chosen race, the new Israel. We share in the priesthood of Christ to offer prayers and sacrifices for others. We are called to a life of holiness in the world and to be attached to Christ, the living stone. There should be no segregation. The world's resources must be equitably distributed, and our charity must not discriminate.

In the gospel, Jesus tells his disciples not to be troubled. Instead, they must trust God and him. Jesus spoke to them in the context of washing the disciples' feet during the Last Supper. Jesus had just offered a service ascribed ordinarily to a servant and foretold his imminent passion and death. The disciples were worried. Hence, Jesus tells them not to be afraid of the present and even the future. He would prepare a place for them in his kingdom. They were confused about where Jesus was going. Jesus then told them he is the way, the truth, and the life. He had just given them his body and blood as food and drink to give them life. The life of the kingdom is a life with Jesus and his Father in heaven. Philip was right to ask Jesus to show them the Father. The response of Jesus highlights the profound relationship between Jesus and his Father, the same Being the Israelites knew as their God. Jesus has worked among them. He performed the works only God did in the Old Testament. Jesus has also spoken to them in different ways to communicate his divinity.

Jesus now wants them to participate in that work for which he came into the world, and they had seen him do. So, the disciples who believe in Jesus will perform the same works as Jesus and even perform greater works in the world. They will reach more lands and spread the message far beyond the confines of Israel, which Jesus could not do within his short time on earth. Those are the works we see the apostles doing in the first reading, spreading the gospel and applying the principles they had learnt from Jesus.