

## **Service & Unity in the Early Church**

*Homily based on Acts 6*

Well, in our first reading today from the Acts of the Apostles, we hear that something was wrong. But before we get to the problem, let us understand the Acts of the Apostles.

That is St. Luke's second volume. Of course, he wrote in his Gospel, and the Acts of the Apostles is the second volume by St. Luke, which describes beautifully and powerfully the formation of the Catholic Church on the foundation of the Apostles under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

So again, with all that going for you, what could possibly go wrong?

Well, somehow, as we hear in our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the Greek-speaking widows were being missed in the daily ministry. These Greek-speaking Jewish women who believed in Jesus Christ somehow were not being ministered to, while the Hebrew- or Aramaic-speaking Jewish Christian widows were receiving ministry.

And so, this problem was brought to the attention of the Twelve Apostles, and they fixed it.

But now, as we go on, the important thing is not just that they fixed it—it's how they fixed this problem, and what that says about us as a Church.

We have such an opportunity to understand a little bit more about the Catholic Church. You know, when you find out something about someone in their past, and then the light bulb goes on, you say, "Oh, that's why that person is the way they are."

So the first thing to consider is: when they discovered they had this problem with widows, they took the problem to the Twelve Apostles. Why? Because they were the leaders of the Church. They were the leaders put in that place by Jesus. They had a promised place.

And with that, we can already see kind of a hierarchy in Church structure developing, and a respect for that authority.

And so, these Apostles prayed, and they laid hands upon these seven men, and they consecrated them as the first deacons. That's—Deacon Wentzel—that's what he goes to for the origin of the diaconate. He brings it back to the Last Supper, when Jesus instituted the sacred priesthood. And then in Acts 6—Acts 6—the beginning of the diaconate is recorded there in Scripture.

And so, they laid hands on them, instituted them as the first deacons. And it was decided that these deacons were really going to be instituted for service. That's what the word deacon means.

“Deacon” in the Greek means service, or ministry. And to that ministry, really taking care of the corporal needs of these women. So they were going to be involved in the corporal works of mercy, while the Apostles said, “We are going to devote ourselves to the spiritual works of mercy—the preaching of the Good News of Jesus Christ.”

So we see the growth of a sacrament. We see the growth of ministries. The division of labor in the Church. Different people doing different ministries.

And we also see the catholicity of the Catholic Church.

“Catholic” means universal.

And so, the Holy Mother Church, at its beginning, is going to take care of everybody. It doesn't matter if you're a Jew or a Greek. It doesn't matter what language you speak—Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin—it doesn't

matter. We are going to take care of everybody.

Everyone is invited to come to know the Lord as the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

And so, in the Acts of the Apostles, we learn a lot about ourselves and about the Catholic Church.

But that's not the only place we can learn about how we are as Catholics. Every time we profess the Creed—the Nicene Creed—at Sunday Mass, we profess that we believe in the four traditional marks of the Church.

We believe that the Catholic Church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

And each one of those is very, very important, because it truly sets us apart according to the intention of Jesus Christ.

Why?

Well, if you read the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Catechism defines one as: the Catholic Church is the sole Church—the one and holy Church that Jesus Christ, our Savior, after His resurrection, entrusted to St. Peter and the Apostles to rule and to extend throughout the world.

That's pretty much the exact quote.

That the intention of Jesus was to found this Church that you belong to today.

Amen. Amen.

One. Holy.

Why is the Catholic Church holy?

Because Jesus gave to the Church, at Pentecost, the gift of the Holy Spirit. So when the Church is here, the Spirit is here. And when we cooperate with

the grace of the Holy Spirit, we become holier ourselves—that we help the world, and the Church, and ourselves to become holier.

One, holy, catholic.

Catholic means universal.

There are about 195 countries in the world. The Catholic Church has a presence in about 190 of them. The Catholic Church is present on all seven continents—including Antarctica.

Yes—remember that prayer—the Catholic Church is even in Antarctica.

One, holy, catholic.

Of course, that is a solid community to dwell in and to proclaim the Good News. And that may be one reason why, this year, we are seeing such a huge influx of people wanting to be fully initiated into the Catholic Church.

But that also highlights the very important role that the Apostles played in standing between Jesus and the Church that we know today.

Because it was those twelve Apostles who handed on the teachings of Jesus. And it was those twelve whom Jesus commissioned to form this Church with the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

So just let that sink in for a moment—how important those twelve Apostles were for all of us to receive the positive faith and the spiritual benefits that we receive today because of them.

One, holy, catholic, apostolic Church.

So today, let us perhaps have our interest lifted a little bit by doing a little extra reading in the Acts of the Apostles, to understand ourselves as Catholics better.

“Oh—that’s why they are the way they are. That’s why we are the way we are.”

The Acts of the Apostles can be very, very revealing.

And with all humility, and the best kind of praise and thanksgiving, may we be thankful today for the gift of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church—in which we come to know, love, and serve the Lord our God in Jesus Christ, who is our Way, our Truth, and our Life.

Amen.