Week 2: The Beginning of Evangelism until the arrest of St. Stephen

- **Brief introduction about St. Luke and the Book of Acts:**
  - St. Luke accompanied the St. Paul on his missionary journeys, so he accurately narrated what he witnessed. Being a physician, he also described events in detail.
  - He did not conclude the book of Acts with "Amen" like the other books because the *Synaxarion* (Church calendar of saints and events) comes after it, serving as the continuation of the Church's history beyond the Book of Acts.
  - The Church reads the **Synaxarion** (the lives of the saints of the day) after the Book of Acts during the liturgy, to declare that the Word of the Lord continues to grow and multiply in His holy Church.
  - The placement of the Book of Acts between the **Gospels** and the **Epistles** serves as a connection between them: the Gospels present the life of Christ, the Book of Acts shows the preaching of the Gospel, and the Epistles reflect how to live according to the Gospel.

- **Introduction:**
  - **Author**: St. Luke
  - **Time of writing:**
    - It was written around the year 63 AD in Rome, after he had written his Gospel. It covers a period of about thirty years—from the Ascension of Christ to Paul's first imprisonment in Rome.
  - **Purpose of the book**
    - A clear record of the ministry of Peter and Paul.
    - Demonstrates the behavior of the early Christians as high examples for us.
    - Shows the mighty work of the Holy Spirit in fulfilling Christ's promises and establishing the Church.
    - Displays the divinity of the Son.
    - Proclaims the divinity of the Holy Spirit.
- **Outline**
  - **Chapter 1** – *The Apostles in Jerusalem from the Ascension to Pentecost:* Includes the selection of Matthias and the worship of the Church.

    - **Chapters 2–7** – *The Beginning of Evangelism until the Martyrdom of Stephen:* Includes the gifts of the Spirit, the growth of the Church, the healing of the lame man, threats against the apostles, the death of Ananias and Sapphira, the imprisonment of the apostles, the selection of seven deacons, and the stoning of Stephen.
    - **Chapters 8–12** – *The Persecution of the Church in Jerusalem:* Includes the faith of the Ethiopian eunuch, the conversions of Paul and Cornelius, the founding of the Church in Caesarea, the martyrdom of James, the imprisonment of Peter, and the death of Herod.
    - **Chapters 13–15** – *The Evangelism of Paul and Barnabas Until Their Separation:* Includes the story of Elymas the sorcerer, the Church in Antioch, the healing of the lame man in Lystra, the stoning of Paul, and the First Council of Jerusalem.
    - **Chapters 16–20** – *Paul's Preaching in Europe*
    - **Chapters 21–28** – *Paul's Trials:* Includes his journey to Jerusalem, his arrest and transfer to stand trial in Rome, his trials before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa, the shipwreck in Malta, and finally his arrival in Rome and preaching there for two years.
- **Reading:**
    - Chapter 3-6
        - Read chapter 3 from 1-19
        - Read Chapter 4 from 3-31
        - Read Chapter 5 from 1-31
        - Read Chapter 6 from 1-8
- **Resources:**
    - The Book of Acts - Fr. Daoud Lamei English
- **Key verse:**
    - "We ought to obey God rather than men." *Acts 5:29*

- **Comments:**
    - **Chapter 3: 1-19, 4:37, 5:42, 6:15,**
        - **The Miracle (Acts 3: 1-10)**
            - The Jews used to pray three times a day: the third hour (9 AM), the sixth hour (12 PM), and the ninth hour (3 PM). In its early days, the early Church used to pray at the same times in Solomon's Porch at the temple, but of course without participating in its sacrifices. This continued until the prayers of the Agpeya were established around the fourth century."
            - **Peter and John:** These two disciples were connected together from the beginning of Christ's calling to them and were present together at special events such as the Transfiguration, the raising of Jairus's daughter, in the Garden of Gethsemane, and by the Sea of Tiberias."
            - Peter and John used the power of Christ and asked for the man healing in our Lord Jesus Christ name
        - **Preaching (Acts 3:11–19):**

- St. Peter took advantage of the crowd that had gathered to witness the miracle, and responded to the people's questions. He strongly emphasized that **neither he nor John were the source of the healing miracle, but rather it was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself**.
  - **Contemplation:** If you do something good and others praise you for it, thank God and redirect the glory to Him, so that you may fade away while He is revealed."
- **Verse 19:** What was required of them then, and of us now is: repentance, turning away from sinful behavior, and confessing the faith in order to receive baptism and the forgiveness of sins.
  Spiritual relief comes from the presence of God, because the Jews expected the coming of the Messiah to bring material relief and deliverance from the Romans. But what is meant here is spiritual relief deliverance from the hand of Satan."

- **Chapter 4: read from verse 3-31**
  - **The trial of Peter and John (Acts 4: 3–19)**
    - The three groups that made up the Sanhedrin gathered: the rulers, meaning the priests; the elders, meaning the heads of the tribes; and the scribes, meaning the scholars and teachers. They gathered in Jerusalem to put the two apostles on trial.
    - They asked about the source of the power by which the miracle was done and the name through which it was performed was repeated—not because they were unaware of the answer, but to find an opportunity in the response to accuse the apostles and punish them.
    - **Verse 8:** Here the Lord's promise is fulfilled (Matthew 10:19–20), that when a Christian is put on trial for the sake of faith, the Holy Spirit will speak through him.
    - **The Cornerstone**: It means that Christ is the foundation of salvation for humanity, and there is no other.
    - Thus, they were released without punishment out of fear of the people, who were glorifying God for the miracle—especially since the man had been sick for over forty years.
    - **Contemplation:** Remind yourself always with this verse " *Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you (the world) more than to God, you judge.*"
  - **The prayer of the apostles (Acts 4:23–31):**
    - The first thing they did after being released was pray. We should learn from the disciples that prayer is very powerful. We see that God listened to their prayer, and the whole place was shaken.
    - They did not ask the Lord to protect them, but rather to strengthen them so that the preaching may succeed. This shows their desire to spread the faith. They were not thinking of themselves, but asked for strength to glorify God through it.
- **Chapter 5: read from verse 1-31**
  - **Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5: 1-11)**

- Although it was within their rights to keep part of the money and give the other part, their sin was hypocrisy and love of appearance, which led to lying. By lying, they were considered as stealing part of God's money, claiming they had given the full price of the land.
- **Verse 3:** Peter declared to Ananias the seriousness of giving in to Satan, who had filled his heart with the desire for recognition. This means Ananias could have rejected the evil thoughts of Satan, but he was careless due to his pride.
- **Contemplation:** 'Against You, I have sinned' (Psalm 51:4).
  Do not forget the presence of God. Remind yourself that He is standing before you, seeing all your actions, words, and thoughts. Even if you fall, quickly repent to Him—He will forgive you."

- **Miracles performed by the apostles, followed by their trial. (Verses 12-31)**:
  - New believers continued to join, but their number was not mentioned this time as it was before when it said five thousand, because the number had increased greatly.
  - Now we see the power of the Holy Spirit, the disciples had previously failed to heal the demon-possessed boy at the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:19), but now they were able to heal all kinds of diseases and cast out demons—even through touch or just the shadow.
  - **Verse 19:** An angel of the Lord came at night, opened the prison door, and brought them out. He instructed them to go and continue preaching. Their release from prison was not an escape, but rather to continue their ministry in the temple, proclaiming eternal life.
  - Contrary to what the Sanhedrin expected, the **apostles went out with joy and enthusiasm for greater preaching**. They considered the suffering of being beaten as sharing in the sufferings of Christ and a preparation for the glory of heaven.
  - The apostles continued steadfast in teaching in the temple and in homes, in the name of the Lord. They held the liturgies and Christian rituals in homes, as churches had not yet been built.

- **Chapter 6: 1-8**
  - **Ordaining deacons (Acts 6: 1-8)**
    - The ordained seven deacons:
      - Number seven: it is one of the sacred numbers that symbolizes the work of the Holy Spirit, such as the seven sacraments of the Church.
      - **Qualifications of deacons**:
        - Good reputation': They are known for their uprightness and fairness.
        - Full of the Holy Spirit
        - Wisdom': Good judgment
      - **Verse 6:** Ordination was carried out by the apostles through prayer and the laying of hands, and this same process continues today in our Church.

        - Here is a clear declaration of the sacrament of priesthood in the ordination of one of the priestly ranks, which is the diaconate. This practice has continued in the Church to this day
    - **The arrest of Stephen (Acts 6:12–15)**

1. Review/recap questions

   ** Servant may add more questions

8. Homework

   ** Servant may add more questions



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