Week 3: The Persecution of the Church in Jerusalem

- **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:**
    - Chapters 7-12
        - Read chapter 7 from 44-60
        - Read Chapter 8 from 1-4, 26-40
        - Read Chapter 9 from 1-31, 36-43
        - Read Chapter 10 from 25-43
        - Read Chapter 11: no readings from chapter 11
        - Read Chapter 12 from 1-25
- **Resources:**
    - The Book of Acts - Fr. Daoud Lamei English
- **Key verse:**
    - "But the word of God grew and multiplied." *Acts 12:24*

- **Comments:**
    - **Acts 7**
        - **St. Stephen's speech (Acts 7: 44-53)**
            - Ver 48, God's presence is not confined to the temple; He does not dwell in a building, but in the hearts of His children who believe in Him.
            - He revealed to the Jews that the hardness of their hearts. Their worship and circumcision were only outward and superficial, without touching their hearts or ears to listen to Christ. The Jews rejected the testimony of the Holy Spirit about Christ in the prophecies of the Old Testament prophets, and even killed the prophets.
            - **Contemplation:** In the same way, a person loses every blessing when they refuse to obey the Holy Scriptures.
        - **The stoning of St. Stephen (Acts 7:54-60):**
            - While the Jews were stoning Stephen, he remained calm and prayerful, asking God to receive his spirit to dwell with Him in heaven. This shows the strength of his faith and his steadfastness in the final moments of his life.

- St. Stephen’s vision of our Lord Jesus Christ setting at the right hand of God was also mentioned in several other places in the bible (old and new testament)
  - **Mark 16:19:** So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.
  - **Ephesians 1:20:** Which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.
  - **Psalm 110:1** The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.
- **Discussion:**
  - **What made his speech so powerful?** as mentioned in verse 55, he, being full of the Holy Spirit.
  - **What can we learn from his forgiveness?** He followed Christ's example by praying for his enemies and showing love toward them

- **Acts 8**
  - **The Church is scattered and Saul persecutes. (Acts 8: 1–4)**
    - **Saul,** a Jewish man from Tarsus and the tribe of Benjamin, was around 40 years old in the early first century. Well-educated, he strongly supported the persecution of Christians.
    - Verse 4, The Christians who were scattered from Jerusalem, in their travels, were not afraid of the Jews. Instead, they continued to preach the word of God in joy, despite the persecution they had endured.
    - **Contemplation:** Truly, the Lord turns sorrow into joy and spiritual gain, and He controls all the events of life to work for our salvation.
    - **How did God use persecution for His plan?** The persecution forced believers to leave Jerusalem, spreading the Gospel to new places.
  - **Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40):**
    - The Holy Spirit led Philip to go to the Ethiopian eunuch.
    - Baptism is essential for salvation:
      - First: Baptism performed by immersion in water.
        Second: Accepting the faith. when the Ethiopian Eunuch said " I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God"
- **Acts 9**
  - **The conversion of Saul (Acts 9: 1-31)**
    - **The encounter with our Lord Jesus Christ (1-9)**
      - God revealed to Saul that the one speaking to him was Jesus, showing him that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.
      - Saul then spent three days blind, fasting, and praying, deeply reflecting on the event.
    - **Ananias and Saul's healing (10-19)**
      - **Ananias** was a devout Christian living in **Damascus**, known for his good reputation among the Jews there. He plays a key role in the conversion of **Saul of Tarsus**
      - **Verse 18,** Scales fell from Saul’s eyes, symbolizing the removal of sin that blinded him from Christ. He immediately regained his sight

and was baptized by Ananias.
    - **Saul begins to preach (20-31)**
        - Saul began preaching in the Jewish synagogues about Christ and His divinity. However, after his baptism, he went to the Arabian desert near Damascus, where he spent three years in solitude. During that time, Christ appeared to him and entrusted him with the faith and the holy mysteries (Galatians 1:16–18). He then returned to Damascus to begin his ministry.
  - **Peter heals and raises the dead. (Acts 9: 36-43)**:
    - Peter didn't rush or perform a show—he **knelt and prayed** before raising Tabitha. This shows us the power of prayers.
- **Acts 10**
  - **The gentiles receive the gospel (25-43)**
    - St. Peter meets Cornelius, a Gentile, and realizes that God shows no partiality but accepts all who fear Him and seek righteousness. Peter humbly refuses worship, emphasizing that he is just a man, and boldly proclaims the Gospel of Jesus—His life, death, resurrection, and the offer of forgiveness to all who believe. This moment marks a turning point, revealing that salvation is for all nations, not just the Jews.
- **Acts 12**
  - **Peter's arrest (Acts 12:1-25)**
    - While Herod arrests Peter and kills James to please the people, the Church prays earnestly—and God miraculously frees Peter from prison, showing that no chains or guards can stop His will.
    - Herod, who sought glory for himself, is struck down by God, reminding us that pride leads to destruction.

1. Review/recap questions

   ** Servant may add more questions

8. Homework

   ** Servant may add more questions

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