

The Magnificent Seven: Acts 6: 1 – 7



The Early Church was not concerned simply with telling the Good News of Jesus Christ by word of mouth. It also took it upon itself to provide for some of the most needy and vulnerable people among its numbers: widows, who in those days before any kind of Welfare State, relied for their basic needs upon the generosity of others. Even in those early days of the Church, however, arguments arose about administration, and questions were raised about the fairness of the distribution of funds between different groups.

The apostles recognised that these concerns could distract them from their own primary tasks of praying and preaching about Jesus, so they appointed seven men to take charge of the situation. It is interesting to note the criteria for this appointment. The apostles did not ask for men who had administrative or accounting skills, or even the ability to get on well with other people. Instead, their request was for “seven men among you who are known to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom”.

What mattered above everything else was that these men should be guided by God’s Spirit, and should possess Spirit- given wisdom. Their task was not an inferior one, to be given to people of lesser significance in the Church. It was as important as the work of preaching, teaching and leading in prayer, and it called for people whose hearts were right with God.

As the story of Acts unfolds, we see that some of these seven Helpers (as the Good News Bible describes them) went on to play other roles in the life of the Church, and their deeds are remembered to this day.

Down through the centuries, the Church has continued to care for needy and vulnerable people, and it has been encouraging to see how this work has gone on in imaginative ways even during the present lockdown. Churches within our own Circuit have continued to offer practical help and support to people whose need has been particularly acute at this time.

Caring for people's physical needs as well as their spiritual ones is an integral part of the Church's work. In fact, the spiritual and physical aspects of our work are inseparable. As William Booth once pointed out, soup, soap and salvation go together.

A Prayer:

Lord, help me to take up the tasks you have for me in the life of your Church, and equip me to do them well. If at this time I cannot take an active part myself, help me to serve your purposes by praying for others in their work, for your name's sake. AMEN

- Rev John Barnett

Image: Fra Angelico – St. Peter consecrates Stephen as Deacon and St. Stephen distributing Alms.