In 1958 the jolly and beloved Cardinal Angelo Guiseppe Roncalli was elected Pope John XXIII just a month before his 77th birthday. His election was viewed by many as interim and one that wasn’t expected to be yield much because of his advanced age; he was considered a “caretaker pope”. He, however, did not see it that way and set into motion one of the most monumental undertakings to take place in the Church’s history: The Second Vatican Council. We have all heard a great deal about this I’m sure in recent weeks because of St. John XXIII’s canonization which took place four weeks ago along with that of St. John Paul II. But as most of you know St. John XXIII did not finish what he started; he died in June of 1963 between the 1st and 2nd sessions of the Council. However, his courage, actions but most importantly his faith are the perfect example of what our readings are
all about this weekend: Chosen-ness; trust in God; and faith in action. In other words: what it means to be “People of God”.

The notion of the “People of God” is one of the great developments that came from the Second Vatican Council in a document on the nature, make up and mission of the Church called *Lumen Gentium* which was one of most important documents to come out of the Council. It came about because Pope St. John XXIII felt it was of the utmost importance for the Council to look at the Church in order to articulate its identity to itself and to the modern world as the Council asked the question, “Who are we as Catholics and how do we relate to the entire world as the Church established by Christ for the salvation of *ALL* mankind?”

The model of the Church as the Body of Christ, with us as the many and varied parts and Christ as our head, is a very good way to describe the visible, Roman Catholic Church, and was, in fact, the preferred way of describing the Church. But, it seemed exclusive and didn’t fully express the MISSION and RESPONSIBILITY that the Church has in its regard to all mankind and their salvation. We are the “Body of Christ” through our baptism and this expresses our
relationship to each other and to God in the Trinity very well but it
doesn’t fully express our purpose for being a Church or even why the
Church is necessary. The Church is *THE* visible representation of
Christ on earth and its purpose is to continue the work of Christ which
is to show mankind the way to the Father and thus make *ALL* people
“People of God”.

The People of God was not a new idea, however. Israel and the
Jewish people, to whom God first chose to reveal Himself and His plan
of salvation, were called the People of God from Old Testament times
and this was the key to fully understanding what it meant to be the
“People of God”. The Hebrews were chosen and called by God to be
His people. They were asked to trust Him, have faith in Him and do
His will and in this way the people fulfilled their covenant with God:
through an active response to God’s call. On this point the theologian
Yves Congar during the Council noted, “*Election in scripture is not just
a privilege, it ALWAYS involves service and mission.*” The mission is
to unify mankind into the People of God as He had intended: but how?

The disciples were faced with the same question in our 1<sup>st</sup> reading
from the Acts of the Apostles. In it we hear about the growing
community of believers, the very early Church, and some of the real struggles that the Apostles were confronted with and needed to address. Seven were CHOSEN from the community, the first Deacons of the Church, to put their faith into action by doing the works of Christ and assisting the community in the daily distribution and by tending to their needs. In this passage we begin to see the emergence of structure in this fledgling faith, the purpose of which was not to create ranks or division within the community but rather to spread the responsibilities of the community among them in order to more effectively fulfill their mission and purpose as given by Christ.

Jesus’ mission is to make the Father known to all mankind and to redeem the human race from their sins through his passion, death and resurrection. The redemption part was achieved once, for all, on Good Friday and Easter Sunday but the other part of the mission continues and as we move deeper into the Easter season and closer to Pentecost our readings are reminding us that the work he started is not fully completed. Ultimately this is what Jesus is telling his disciples in the Gospel today as he prepares them for his departure in his passion and death; have faith in me and prove it by continuing to do what I have
done. He says, “whoever believes in me will do the works that I do”,
THIS is how we become the “People of God”. Jesus is calling us to
Holiness by commissioning us to go and bring the news of salvation to
all mankind by revealing the Father through the works of Christ.

It is our belief in Christ, the Son of God, who is God that makes us
the People of God. But that belief is not just a profession or prayerful
observance rather it is exemplified in our actions as WE continue to do
the works of God here on earth. We as Catholics have a duty and
responsibility to share the message of salvation to those around us in
order to complete the work of Christ here on earth by bringing the
message of salvation to ALL mankind. This evangelization begins by
the way we live our faith. We can do this in simple ways through
stewardship in the parish. Whether we minister as a lector, Eucharistic
minister or usher on Sunday, we assist in the works of Christ. If we
sponsor a candidate in the RCIA or assist in the Parish School of
Religion or participate in a Small Church Community we assist in the
work of the Church. Likewise, we can act outside of our parish in
various outreach programs such W.A.R.M. or the St. Vincent DePaul
society or the Knights of Columbus or many other community or civic
programs that helps those in need. These are just a few examples of how we can put our faith into action. Whether we are clergy, religious, or the laity, it is through our charitable works, and our participation in Mass and the sacraments, that we follow Jesus to the Father and become the People of God. All of this may seem extremely daunting and a task that is beyond us to achieve but as Jesus and St. John XXIII showed us, completing the work ourselves is not necessarily as important as answering the call to be People of God by deciding, with faith, to undertake the endeavor in the first place.