

Daily Prayer

St Stephen

Wednesday, August 3, 2022

We enter into a time of quiet. We offer to God our selves and in the silence know that God embraces us as God's very own. We offer our hopes and our concerns through our prayers and in the silence listen for God. Today we hold in our prayers the ordinary moments in life—the trials and the joys. We remember St Stephen, Deacon and Martyr.

We begin by saying

O God, make speed to save us.

O Lord, make haste to help us.

Make me to know your ways, O Lord.

and teach me your paths.

The First Reading

Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and others of those from Cilicia and Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. Then they secretly instigated some men to say, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.' They stirred up the people as well as the elders and the scribes; then they suddenly confronted him, seized him, and brought him before the council. They set up false witnesses who said, 'This man never stops saying things against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses handed on to us.' And all who sat in the council looked intently at him, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Then the high priest asked him, 'Are these things so?' And Stephen replied:

'Brothers and fathers, listen to me. The God of glory appeared to our ancestor Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran,

'You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are for ever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do. Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers. You are the ones that received the law as ordained by angels, and yet you have not kept it.'

When they heard these things, they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen. But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!' But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he died.

Acts 6.8-7.2a,51c-60

The Psalm

In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame; ♦
deliver me in your righteousness.

Incline your ear to me; ♦
make haste to deliver me.

Be my strong rock, a fortress to save me,
for you are my rock and my stronghold; ♦
guide me, and lead me for your name's sake.

Take me out of the net
that they have laid secretly for me, ♦
for you are my strength.

Into your hands I commend my spirit, ♦
for you have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.

I hate those who cling to worthless idols; ♦
I put my trust in the Lord.

I will be glad and rejoice in your mercy, ♦
for you have seen my affliction
and known my soul in adversity.

'Make your face to shine upon your servant, ♦
and save me for your mercy's sake.'

Psalm 31.1-7, 16

The Gospel Reading

Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

'But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of

heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Matthew 24.34-39

In silence, we ask what the readings have to say to us today. Is there something that draws us more deeply into the reading? What does God have to say to us? What do we have to ask God?

When the time is right, we conclude our time of silence with the canticle

The Canticle ~ Song of Simeon

Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace: ♦
your word has been fulfilled.

My own eyes have seen the salvation ♦
which you have prepared in the sight of every people;

A light to reveal you to the nations ♦
and the glory of your people Israel.

Luke 2. 29-32

*Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.*

We continue in prayer for those people and situations that we hold up before God (The Intercessions) and continue with the concluding collect, the Lord's prayer and the closing sentences.

The Intercessions

That this and all our days
may be full of your praise:

we pray to you, O Lord.

That you will keep us this day without sin:

we pray to you, O Lord.

That we may walk before you
in the paths of righteousness and peace:

we pray to you, O Lord.

That you will bless your people
and lift them up for ever:

we pray to you, O Lord.

That you will guide and protect us by your Holy Spirit
and bring us with your saints to glory everlasting:

we pray to you, O Lord.

Let us commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray,
to the mercy and protection of God.

Our prayers conclude

Lord God,

whose servant Stephen had the courage to face death in hope,
and the compassion to pray for the forgiveness of his murderers,
grant us, we pray, some share in his gifts,

that we may bring the truth of the gospel to the world
with boldness of word and with gentleness of deed,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[let us pray as our Saviour taught us,]

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen

We conclude

May Christ our Saviour give us peace.
Amen.

St Stephen

Deacon and Martyr—Holy Day

Stephen appears in the Book of Acts when the church at Jerusalem was experiencing internal troubles. Its membership was drawn from two groups of Jews — those who were native Palestinians and those who belonged to “the Dispersion.” The latter group consisted of Jews who had been born and raised in other lands; their native tongue was Greek, and so they were called “the Hellenists.” Rivalry between these two groups had been a feature of Jewish life for a long time, and converts to Christ brought it with them when they entered the Church. It made the Greek-speaking members quick to complain that their widows were not getting a fair share of the community’s food and financial support. To resolve the problem, the apostles appointed seven of the Hellenists to administer the Church’s resources and care for its poor. Stephen, described as “a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit,” was one of these seven. Set apart by prayer and the laying-on of hands he became the first to do what the Church considers to be the work of a deacon.

Stephen’s activities involved more than administrative duties, for the Book of Acts speaks of his preaching the gospel and performing many miracles. These activities brought him into conflict with Jews who shared his own Greek-speaking background; they accused him of blasphemy and hauled him before the council which enforced the law of Moses. Stephen gave a powerful speech denouncing the whole assembly because their refusal to accept Jesus Christ revealed their disobedience to God. Enraged by his words, his audience dragged him out of the city and stoned him to death.

Just before he died under the hail of stones Stephen prayed that Jesus would receive his spirit and forgive his murderers. He thereby became the first Christian martyr — not only because he died for his witness to Christ, but also because he bore witness to God's will that all, even our worst enemies, may know forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

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