

Within a day of the Lord's holy Nativity, His chancel stained red from His martyrs. The Church throughout the world this day Dec. 26, 2nd Day of the ChristMass, remembers St. Stephen, she gives thanks to God for this faithful servant, holy martyr.

Stephen, 1 of 7 deacons called to serve the Greek members of the early Church in Jerusalem. Assistant pastor to the Apostles, he did what he was called, ordained to do: preach Gospel, administered the Holy Sacraments of Christ.

The shepherds saw the divine majesty hidden in the humble appearance of a baby in a manger, today see the majesty of Christ hidden in the murder of Stephen; the example of all God's people who proclaim Christ. What's more -His legacy, His followers—His disciples were told that they can expect much of the same. **A servant is not greater than his master.” If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.** Stephen's death, recorded in Acts, runs parallel in several facts to Christ's death: arrested by the Sanhedrin, uses God's word to refute lies, accused of preaching against the prophets, convicted with lies, false accusations, sentenced to death while he prayed for His murderers, **Father forgive them they know not what they do, do not charge them with this sin.** Oh that you would learn to have that upon your lips for others, to learn to pray that.

While Christmas seems as far away from someone being murdered with stones, there is the same glorious beauty. As Stephen was dying, God granted him a glimpse into heaven, saw the glory of God, Jesus. Christmas is not far away. For God came in the flesh, born a man, to redeem flesh in His sacrifice, to ascend at the right hand of God -that is reigning over all things, as also a man, as our incarnate advocate forever. This is the culmination of all the prophets foretold. The culmination of all of history, all mankind.

As Stephen preaches the Law, not only then and there, but here and now to you -take it seriously, a warning against your own idolatry and hardness of heart, heed the call to repentance and the new life which is yours in Christ.

Take it to heart, trust, believe St. Stephen's beautiful proclamation of the Gospel. Stephen remains steadfast in the faith, his confession, preaching of Jesus, even to the point of death. He laid down his life without bitterness, but with charity in his heart and on his lips for those who hated him, persecuted him, because he had already died and risen with the Lord in his Holy Baptism. How then could Stephen die.

So, then, with Stephen receive and find your life entirely in the Lord; and so boldly carry out your vocations, serve your stations in this body and life on earth, knowing with the certainty of faith -there is nothing anyone can do to rob you of the life that is yours in Him. To confess Christ in the face of all evil, in the face of all fears and death.

To be sure, there are those who may hurt you, burden you, make your circumstances difficult and hard to bear, even if your life is spared. The stones that cut into Stephen's body, spilled his blood, shattered his bones - did not rob him of his life in Christ, immortal, imperishable. So also are you preserved in safety, peace, and Sabbath rest within the Body of Christ Jesus, no matter what may happen to your poor body here and now.

Indeed, as your mortal body of flesh and blood is fed with His Body and Blood, so shall your body also be raised in glory, no matter how it may be punished and given to death in this brief span of time.

You have this boldness, confidence to live your life and to face your death, not from within yourself, but from the Lord who comforts you, strengthens you with His Word and Spirit in the Gospel. There is nothing and no one who shall ever be permitted or able to prevail against you; they could not truly harm Stephen, nor can anything truly harm His own, you. You are His. You cannot die.

Stephen, not afraid of dying; the birth of our Lord in the flesh changes our entire reality and how His saints see death, especially in our day when death is talked about daily. Jesus took on flesh precisely so He could bring death to life, mourning to joy.

Let not your hearts be troubled. Do not fear the pain or struggle with the consequence of sin and this evil world. Not according to our fallen reason, but in God's good time, only according to His will. His ways not our ways; His thoughts not our thoughts. It is far greater than you can imagine for you, even if it's painful for you now.

learn to pray, **Father forgive them they know what they do, do not charge them with this sin.** Stephen rejoiced in the day of suffering, for he knew the good work God began in Him in baptismal waters is being brought to completion; so it is done for your loved ones in Christ who have gone before you who live in perfect bliss with the Lord in the company of heaven.

Join Stephen, our loved ones in Christ, all the saints in this Christmass feast. God with us, your Emmanuel. In Him, you can endure, for He is your life. Frohe Weihnacten. Merry Christmas.