

## 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, Year C

### Acts 7:55-60

*This is the story of the church's first martyr, Stephen, who was a Greek speaking Jew who accepted Christianity. He and six others were appointed and ordained as the first deacons to preach and provide for the care of the needy of the community. While preaching to other Greek speaking Jews, they charged him before the council. The burden of the charge was a prediction of the destruction of the temple and of the change of the law. He also charged the Jews with killing the prophets and Jesus.<sup>2</sup> What he said was judged to be blasphemy and he was stoned to death probably in early 37 A.D.<sup>1</sup>*

**55** Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen has already been identified in prophetic terms but this designation emphasizes that those who have “always resisted the Holy Spirit” and “killed the prophets” are doing so again in the rejection of Stephen. **looked up intently to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God,**

**56** and Stephen said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened The heavens were closed from the time of Adam until the time of Christ.<sup>3</sup> **and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”** This refers to Jesus depicted as the Messianic King from Daniel. Though normally seated upon his throne, he stands up to give Stephen a royal welcome into his kingdom.

**57** But they cried out in a loud voice, covered their ears, This physical gesture is wonderfully expressive of Stephen’s charge that they are “uncircumcised in ears” (7:51). They do everything to keep from hearing the prophet’s proclamation that Jesus is the one raised to the presence of God. **and rushed upon him together.** The Jewish tribunal was unable to pass any formal sentence of death because of Roman restrictions but the sentence proved unnecessary as the crowd became a lynching party.<sup>3</sup>

**58** They threw him out of the city, This crude means of execution was always staged outside Israelite camps and cities according to the directives in Leviticus. **and began to stone him. The witnesses laid down their cloaks at the feet** “at the feet” is a phrase that signifies recognition of Paul as a leader of those opposed to Stephen and the followers of Christ, a position that he will continue to carry out as we are told in chapter 8. **of a young man named Saul.** This was the Jewish name for Paul, who experienced the benefit of Stephen’s intercession. St. Augustine wrote, “If Stephen had not prayed to God, the Church would not have had Paul.” It was Paul who first gave Stephen the title, “martyr” in 22:20.

**59** As they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Stephen prayed to Jesus as Jesus prayed to the Father.

**60** Then he fell to his knees and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them”; and when he said this, he fell asleep. Stephen became not only the first martyr, but the model for all martyrs as he preached the Lord’s Passion and imitated it in his meekness as he commended his soul to God and prayed for his persecutors.<sup>3</sup>

## Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20

**12I John, heard a voice** This voice is identified in verse 16 as that of Jesus. **saying to me: “Behold, I am coming soon. I bring with me the recompense I will give to each according to his deeds.** There will be a final judgment and this judgment is not just for believers! The resurrection of all the dead will precede the Last Judgment. This will be the hour when all who are in the tombs will hear the Son of Man’s voice and come forth. Then Christ will come in his glory and all the angels with him. The truth of each man’s relationship with God will be laid bare. The Last Judgment will reveal even to its furthest consequences the good each person has done or failed to do during his earthly life. After that both soul and body will spend eternity in either heaven or hell.

**13I am the Alpha and the Omega,** These are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. **the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”** Here this is said about Jesus but before this it has only been said about God.

**14Blessed are they** This is the seventh and last beatitude in revelation. **who wash their robes** This refers to Baptism. **so as to have the right to the tree of life** This refers to the Eucharist. **and enter the city through its gates.** This refers to the heavenly gates of the new Jerusalem, the holy city, in which nothing profane dwells with the tree of life.

**16I, Jesus, sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the root and offspring of David,** Jesus was the one whom Israel awaited for he was born of the lineage of David through his mother but as God he was the source or “root” as well as the “offspring.” **the bright morning star.”** Both of these messianic titles given Jesus come from the Old Testament. “Morning star” signals the dawn and can be seen before the dawn has fully broken. In a sense, the morning star announces the sun.

**17The Spirit** “The Spirit” is the Spirit of Jesus that inspires the prophets. **and the bride** “the bride” is the Church. **say, “Come.”** This is addressed to Christ and is the prayer for the arrival of the second coming of Christ that we say during advent: “marana tha” or “come Lord Jesus.” It is an expression of hope that his coming will be soon. **Let the hearer** This means every hearer of the book. **say, “Come.” Let the one who thirsts come forward, and the one who wants it receive the gift of life-giving water.** This was also part of the liturgical practice of summoning the righteous to the Eucharist. This summons was a call to come and receive the promised reward. This was connected with the pronouncement of a formula excluding all nonbelievers and all who are not holy. The audience is thus reminded that the summons into the liturgical assembly is an image of that final summons to the gathering of the holy ones of God.

**20The one who gives this testimony says, “Yes, I am coming soon.”** Jesus proclaims, for the third time in this chapter, that he is soon to return! It is a principal theme of the book and it provides a particularly fitting conclusion for the entire Bible. Salvation history is to be consummated by the triumphal return of Christ. **Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!** The title “Lord” indicates divine sovereignty. To confess or invoke Jesus as Lord is to believe in his divinity.

## John 17:20-26

*Our selection is part of the High-Priestly Prayer of Jesus in which he consecrates his body and blood for the sacrifice in which they are about to be offered, and his benediction over the Church that he is to bring forth in his glorification. Our verses are called the "Prayer for all believers."*

Lifting up his eyes to heaven, Jesus prayed saying:

**20**"Holy Father, I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, Jesus' prayer reaches into the future to bless those of every age who come to believe through the preaching of the Apostles.

**21**so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, The unity that he had besought for the first disciples in verse 11 must remain the characteristic of the Church of all time. that the world may believe that you sent me. Unless the Church preserves the unity willed by God, it cannot fully perform its essential mission in the world. The unity of the Church shows forth the union of Father and Son that is its model and principle.

**22**And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, Christ has communicated grace to the Church. The change grace works in Christians makes us ever more like Christ and it is the source of holiness of Christians and of the Church.

**23**I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, While we know that the Church is not perfectly unified in the world today, the CCC teaches us that unity is a gift from Christ to the Church and that we have a job to do for we are "to pray and work to maintain, reinforce, and perfect the unity that Christ wills for her." that the world may know This vision of unity is not only spiritual, but also visible and organizational, so that even the world can see it clearly. that you sent me, When the Church is true to its destiny, God continues to be revealed. and that you loved them even as you loved me. The standard of comparison is breathtaking! Since the Christians are God's children and endowed with the life that Jesus has from the Father, God loves these children as He loves His Son! There is only one love of God and we are included in it!

**24**Father, they are your gift to me. "They" are the followers of Christ, the Church, through all ages. I wish that where I am they also may be with me, This is a prayer for the salvation of believers. that they may see my glory that you gave me, Not just the glory on earth, but also the fullness of glory in heaven. because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

**25**Righteous Father, the world also does not know you, but I know you, and they know that you sent me.

**26**I made known to them your name and I will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them." These are the last words of Jesus before his arrest and crucifixion as recorded in the Book of John. Christ continues to make known his Father's love, by means of the Church, in which he is always present: "I am with you always, to the close of the age."

*Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: "The Founding of Christendom" by Warren H. Carroll, "Dictionary of the Bible" by John L. McKenzie, S.J., "The Navarre Bible: Acts of the Apostles," "Catechism of the Catholic Church," "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles," "The Acts of the APOSTLES" by Luke Timothy Johnson, "Revelation" by Wilfrid J. Harrington, O.P., "The Apostolic Fathers" edited by J.B. Lightfoot and J.R. Harmer; "The Collegeville Bible Commentary," "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of John," "The Navarre Bible: St. John," "The Gospel According To John XIII-XXI" by Raymond E. Brown, and "Catholic Bible Study: John" by Stephen K. Ray.*

### **PRAYER FOR THE UNITY OF CHRISTIANS**

**Almighty and Eternal God, You gather the scattered sheep and watch over them. Look with kindness on all who follow Jesus, Your Son. With the seal of one baptism You marked them. Now make them one in fullness of faith and unite them with the bonds of love. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen**

*In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.*