

Life

In Greek, Stephen means "crown", and as his name refers, Stephen was the first saint to achieve the crown of martyrdom. Stephen was killed around 34 AD, and he is the patron of deacons. He is often shown carrying a palm frond, symbolizing victory, peace and eternal life.

After Pentecost, the number of people who were baptized surged. The Jews who spoke the Greek language complained that the needs of their widows were ignored in the daily supplies. The twelve apostles decided to choose seven "reputable disciples who are filled with the Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6: 3) whom they will appoint to take charge of meals. Stephen was one of these seven deacons, and the Acts of the Apostles described him as one who is "filled with grace and virtue" (Acts 6:8). Many Jews were defeated in their debate with Stephen, so they accused him falsely, seized him and brought him before the Sanhedrin to be tried. Stephen argued strongly and defended his faith, making the crowd more furious. Stephen was finally stoned to death, but he prayed for those who killed him before he died.

Reflection/resolution

Stephen was the first martyr of the church. In Greek, "martyr" and "witness" are the same word. A martyr sheds his blood to witness his faith. Although we have little chance of giving our lives for Christ, we can follow the good example of Stephen and learn how to testify for Christ in life. Before the Angelus on December 26, 2022, Pope Francis pointed out: "the Acts of the Apostles tells us that he was one of the seven deacons that the community of Jerusalem had consecrated for table service, that is, for charity. This means that his first witness was not given in words, but through the love with which he served those most in need... He spoke of Jesus to those he met. . . This is the second dimension of his witness... Charity and proclamation, this was Stephen. However, his greatest testimony is yet another... He left it to us at the point of his death when, following the example of Jesus, he forgave his killers. " The Pope teaches us to become better witnesses of Christ through acts of love, preaching God's words and forgiveness.

At that time, Saul, who guarded the clothes of the witnesses, approved the killing of Stephen and even hoped to destroy the church, but eventually, Saul converted and became Paul the apostle who spread the words of God everywhere. Similarly, the church in Jerusalem was severely persecuted after the death of Stephen, so believers fled and scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, but because of this, the good news of the gospel also spread to various places (Acts 8: 1-4). God's plan is wonderful and can change darkness into light. When we see or suffer from wrongs in the world which are beyond our ability to correct, let us reflect on the history of the church. Even when we cannot see any hope, we still keep our faith and surrender to the all-powerful and all-loving God, "for nothing will be impossible for God". (Luke 1:37)

Prayer

The prayer Stephen uttered before he died, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit ... Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" (Acts 7: 59-60) is an imitation of Jesus' prayer on the cross. : "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit ... Father! Forgive them! Because they don't know what they do." (Luke 23: 34-38). Stephen's faith and hope let him give his life to God like Jesus; his love made him unwilling to persecute those who harmed him. Let us seek growth in the virtues of faith, hope and charity, so that our prayer has a solid foundation, making it easier to follow Christ.

May we learn from St. Stephen to witness Christ through acts of love, preaching God's words and forgiveness.

We pray for all deacons and our parishioners who are in the diaconate formation program to become deacons.

St. Stephen, pray for us.