

Sunday, May 3, 2026 – Fifth Sunday of Easter

First Reading: Acts 6: 1-15

1-5 - Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. The twelve called together the whole community and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word." What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch.

7 - The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

8-15 - 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.

Acts 7:51-54

"You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are forever 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." When they heard these things, they became enraged.

Acts 7: 55-60

Filled with the Holy Spirit, [Stephen] 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!" 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.

*The Bible usually describes Jesus as sitting at the right hand of the Father, in order to emphasize the fact that He has completed the work of making possible our salvation.
Hebrews 10: 12 – But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God.*

But here in verses 55 and 56 Jesus is described as standing at the right hand of God.

Jesus is giving Stephen a standing ovation.

What a great way to end your life – to have Jesus give you a standing ovation!

As he was dying Stephen said two things that sound very much like two of the seven last words of Jesus.

"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Cf. Luke 23: 46 – "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (crying with a loud voice).

"Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (something he cried with a loud voice).

Cf. Luke 23: 34 – "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Psalm 31: 5 - Into your hands I commend my spirit, for you have redeemed me, O LORD, God of truth.

Is this a prayer that Jesus and Stephen learned as young children?

The time to learn faith stabilizing and faith reinforcing Scriptures is before you need them.

What are some Scriptures that you are very grateful that you learned before you needed them?

Acts 8:1 - That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria.

What good thing might result from the way in which the church is now being scattered?

Gospel: John 14:1-14

1 - Do not let your hearts be troubled.

Is your heart today particularly troubled? If so, about what?

3 - I go and prepare a place for you.

If Jesus has been spending this long preparing a place for us, it must be a pretty amazing place.

6 - I am the way, and the truth, and the life.

Jesus is not just saying He can show us the way. Rather He is saying that He is the way.

6 - No one comes to the Father except through me.

Do you believe that all religions are equally valid and valuable? Or do you believe that it does matter whether people know, love, believe in, and put their trust in Jesus?

12 - The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.

Jesus is saying that asking in His name will link us to Him. By means of prayer, His power is made available to us.

13-14 - I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

If that statement is not enough to get us to pray, I do not know what would be enough.

Things happen – and do not happen – when we pray.

Genesis 18 – God was willing to let the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah rest on Abraham's prayers.

Exodus 17 – The turnout of the battle between Israel and the Amalekites was dependent upon Moses' prayers.

Ezekiel 22: 30 – God told the prophet that He would be more than willing to show mercy to His people if He were to find even one intercessor to stand in the gap and plead on their behalf.

God releases His grace and power when we pray.

In prayer we go before God and ask Him to release into the life of someone else something that we ourselves on our own would never be able to supply.