

SAINTS ALIVE! DECEMBER 26: ST. STEPHEN: COMMON GOOD



Stephen is first mentioned in Acts of the Apostles as one of seven deacons appointed by the Apostles:

“At that time, as the number of disciples continued to grow, the Hellenists (Greek-speaking Christians) complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.”

So the Twelve called together the community of the disciples and said, ‘It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to serve at table. Brothers, select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint to this task, whereas we shall devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’”

The proposal was acceptable to the whole community, so they chose Stephen, a man filled with faith and the holy Spirit ...” (Acts 6: 1-5).

These first Christians held their property in common. Seven reputable men were selected to distribute food and charitable aid to poorer members of the community in the early church. **St. Stephen was one of the seven original deacons of the Church who were called by the Apostles to care for widows and the poor, the common good.**

What is the Common Good? “Every social group must take account of the needs and legitimate aspiration of other groups, and even of the general welfare of the entire human family” (Church and the Modern World, #26).

In other words, when considering the impact on man, our faith demands that we consider not just the impact on the people important to us, but to all people, including the widows and the poor. **Ask not what is best for me but what is best for all.**

Why? Because “people are created in the image and likeness of God and are therefore called to be neighbors to one another. We are created as social beings who must exercise a certain responsibility toward our neighbors. Each is responsible ... for promoting the good of the entire human community and the good of our common home” (Columbia River Watershed Pastoral Letter).

“In the concept of the common good, community and individual *needs* take priority over private *wants*...” (CRWPL).

Specifically, when considering the impact on man, our faith demands that our first analysis is the impact on the men, women, and children who are poor and vulnerable. The individuals and communities with needs. That is the instruction of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46).

The Catholic principle of the common good also applies to the environment.

“Care for the environment ... is a matter of a common and universal duty, that of respecting a common good” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, #466).

Pope Francis offers an example, “The **climate** is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all” (Laudato Si’, #23).

In Pope Benedict’s message for the 2010 *World Day of Peace, If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation* he stressed, “The environment must be seen as God’s gift to all people, and the use we make of it entails a shared responsibility for all humanity, *especially the poor* (italics added) and future generations” (#2)

Which leads us back to St. Stephen who, understanding his faithful obligation to the common good, cared for the poor in his midst. St. Stephen, pray for us!



Office of Life, Justice, & Peace