

“He is Risen!”

Acts Bible Study
St. Peter’s Catholic Church

Week Three: Stephen’s Arrest and Martyrdom

- **Welcome**

For the small groups meeting over the internet, it’s good to start off with a few minutes checking in and greeting each other.

- **Begin with a prayer**

In your own words, you can thank God for this opportunity to read his Word, and ask him to guide our reflection on Holy Scripture and our discussion together.

- **Scripture to read and discuss: Acts 6:8-15, 7:51-60**

Now Stephen, filled with grace and power, was working great wonders and signs among the people. Certain members of the so-called Synagogue of Freedmen, Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and people from Cilicia and Asia, came forward and debated with Stephen, but they could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke. Then they instigated some men to say, “We have heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God.” They stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes, accosted him, seized him, and brought him before the Sanhedrin. They presented false witnesses who testified, “This man never stops saying things against [this] holy place and the law. For we have heard him claim that this Jesus the Nazorean will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us.” All those who sat in the Sanhedrin looked intently at him and saw that his face was like the face of an angel. ...

“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always oppose the holy Spirit; you are just like your ancestors. Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They put to death those who foretold the coming of the righteous one, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become. You received the law as transmitted by angels, but you did not observe it.”

When they heard this, they were infuriated, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, filled with the holy Spirit, looked up intently to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” But they cried out in a loud voice, covered their ears, and rushed upon him together. They threw him out of the city, and began to stone him. The witnesses laid down their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul. As they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” 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.

- **Discussion / Reflection:**

(Please note, these are meant as a tool to start fruitful discussion. In a small group with great participation you may not get to all the questions. Discussion time should be about 30 minutes in length.)

- How was Stephen treated as charges were brought against him?
- What comparison is used between Moses and Jesus?
- What is Stephen's response to the accusations and stoning?
- How do we, as baptized Christians, become stiff-necked and stubborn, resisting the Holy Spirit, as Stephen said of his listeners?
- What parallels do you see between Jesus and Stephen, in Stephen's ministry, trial, and death?
- How do we hold Jesus close in the midst of suffering?
- When we need to speak boldly about our faith, what are some strategies we can use?

- **For the week:**

Prayerfully read chapter 8 of Acts. We will see persecution start to occur, but the Lord uses this suffering to enable the Gospel to spread even further! We start to see the Church begin to expand past Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria, beginning the second "stage" in the growth that Jesus described before ascending to heaven ("You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8) Consider:

- How does Jesus work through Philip to continue his ministry? (In other words, what things does Philip do that are similar to the Lord's words and actions?)
- What is inspiring to you about the way Philip explains the Good News to the eunuch, and how the eunuch responds?

Why not spend time in daily prayer this week, building a new habit or increase one that has already started, developing it further? Quiet yourself, ask for the Lord to be present with you, talk to the Lord, listen in silence, and be thankful!

- **Close with a prayer**

In small group, were there any intentions? This would be a good time to lift up those intentions and ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit when we encounter accusations or sufferings?

Extra Note from Father Andrew:

In chapter 8, it is noteworthy that the apostles are conferring the gift of the Holy Spirit through what we would later call the Sacrament of Confirmation, even though they did not yet have this name. They are able to do this because they have authority from Jesus; like Confirmation, this authority is also passed on in Acts through the laying on of hands, which we would later call the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Simon the Magician sins by asking to pray to be given the gift of Holy Orders. This is where the word "simony" comes from, meaning the sinful practice of selling positions of leadership in the Church.