

MENTOR 1: STEPHEN

THE LESSON: ACTS 6, 7

The book of Acts tells us the story of the spreading of the Gospel. Jesus had been raised from the dead and had ascended into heaven. The Holy Spirit had been sent to indwell his disciples. The apostles were preaching the good news. But not everyone was happy to hear it. In fact, many of the religious power-brokers who had felt threatened by Jesus were angry to discover that killing him had not ended the story. Instead, the message of Christ was gaining more and more followers.

The Church in Jerusalem grew to such an extent that it became necessary to appoint new leaders to share in some of the duties that the apostles no longer had time for. Several men were appointed to this role, including Stephen, who was described as “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit”.

Christians honour Stephen as the “*protomartyr*” – the first martyr of the Church. In his death, Stephen follows in the footsteps of Christ and models for us not just how we should live, but also how we should face persecution and death.

Stephen’s faithfulness to the very end bore fruit beyond his death. Immediately following this event, a persecution broke out which caused believers to scatter, resulting in the Gospel being spread more broadly throughout the known world. And who would have guessed at the time that the man collecting the coats of the executioners, listening to Stephen’s speech and approving his murder, would himself become one of the greatest missionaries in the history of the Christian Church?

AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Each morning and evening, follow the rule of prayer that you created for yourself.

(If you didn’t make one, try saying the morning and evening prayers from the “Forms of Prayer to be used in Families,” which begins on page 728 of the BCP. If you don’t have a copy, you can look it up here: <http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer>.)

Spend some time considering the example of Stephen. Ask God to help you to see your life and death from a heavenly perspective. Close with this prayer adapted from 2 Thessalonians 1: 11, 12: **“God, make me worthy of your calling and fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by your power, so that the name Jesus may be glorified in me, and I in him, according to your grace. Amen.”**

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this collect, pausing to reflect after each phrase.

Grant, O Lord, that in all our sufferings here upon earth, for the testimony of thy truth, we may steadfastly look up to heaven, and by faith behold the glory that shall be revealed; and, being filled with the Holy Spirit, may learn to love and bless our persecutors, by the example of thy first Martyr Saint Stephen, who prayed for his murderers to thee, O blessed Jesus, who standest at the right hand of God to succor all those that suffer for thee, our only Mediator and Advocate. Amen. (COLLECT FOR ST. STEPHEN THE MARTYR, BCP PAGE 108)

MENTOR 1: STEPHEN

ACTS 6, 7: THE PROTOMARTYR AND WHAT HE SAW

6 ⁸And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. ¹⁰But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. ¹¹Then they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” ¹²And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, ¹³and they set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, ¹⁴for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.” ¹⁵And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

7 ¹And the high priest said, “Are these things so?” ²And Stephen said:

“Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, ³and said to him, ‘Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you’... ⁹“And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him... ³⁰“Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush... ³⁹Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt... ⁴⁴“Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen... ⁴⁸Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands... ⁵¹“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. ⁵²Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, ⁵³you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”

⁵⁴Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. ⁵⁵But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” ⁵⁷But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. ⁵⁸Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.