

## Homily of Seventh Sunday of Easter Year C, 2022

**Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 97:1-2, 6-7, 9; Revelation 22:22-14, 16-17, 20; John 17:20-26**

The trial and the death of Jesus and the trial and death of Stephen have some resemblance. Jesus was falsely accused: "The chief priests and the whole Council tried to find some evidence against Jesus so that they might put him to death, but they were unable to find any. Even though many came up to speak falsely against him, their evidence did not agree. At last some stood up, and gave false witnesses... even so, their evidence did not agree" (Mark 14:55-59). Stephen was falsely accused: "Some men came forward... As they were unable to face the truth, they bribed some men to say, 'We heard him speak against Moses and against God.' So they stirred up the people, the elders and the teachers of the Law; they seized him... and brought him before the Council. Then they produced false witnesses [against him]" (Acts 6:8-15). The soldiers led Jesus outside the city, a place called Golgotha, which means the Skull, where he was crucified (Mark 15:20-22). Stephen was thrown out of the city, and stoned to death. Jesus prayed on the Cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Stephen prayed while being stoned, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." Jesus prayed as he died, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). Stephen prayed as he died, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Jesus and Stephen put before us the cost and rough path of discipleship. Whether false accusation, false witnessing, torture, cast out, and death, we are to pray for our detractors and forgive them. We are to commend ourselves into God's hand. Like Stephen, we are to look up intently to heaven and see the glory of God and Jesus at the right hand of God. That is where our spiritual strength comes from. In Acts 7:54-55, while Stephen's killers were enraged and gnashed their teeth at him, Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit and fixed his eyes on heaven!

John chapter 17 is one of the greatest chapters in the New Testament because Jesus helps us to understand that Christians and non-Christians should live in unity and peace. Jesus prays, "Holy Father, I pray not only for them (Christians), but also those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may be one." Jesus also says, "I have other sheep which are not of this fold. These I have to lead as well, and they listen to my voice. Then there will be one flock, since there is one shepherd" (John 10:16). "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Therefore, whoever speaks truth and lives truth believes in Jesus. That is why the Catholic Church relates peacefully and cordially with members of all religions that speak truth and live truth, because the truth they speak and live is Jesus. For this reason, Christians are to preach unity and oneness, and witness Jesus to everyone in all nations.

Unfortunately, there is so much religious persecution in many parts of the world. We pray that the Spirit of Jesus touches the hearts of perpetrators of religious persecution to seek unity and oneness which Jesus prayed and preached. We pray for unity and oneness in the Christian fold where there are so much bitter divisions, disagreements, unhealthy criticisms, castigations, and rejections among churches and sects. We pray for unity and oneness instead of division, disunity, false accusation and false witnessing, throwing of stones, and crucifying of one another in our homes, work places, communities, groups, parishes, countries and the world.

In the second reading, Jesus declares, "Behold, I am coming soon. I bring with me the recompense I will give to each according to his deeds. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." ... "I, Jesus, sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the root and offspring of David, the bright morning star. ... Let the one who thirsts come forward, and the one who wants it receive the gift of life-giving water" (Revelation 22:12-17). We pray to Jesus to fulfill his word; for there is so much turmoil and violence in our lives and in our society. The situation in Nigeria and many other parts of the world are helpless. We are, indeed, thirsting.

We conclude with an Advent hymn, "**Come Lord Jesus, the light is dying.**"

***Christ come quickly, there's danger at the door,  
Poverty a plenty, hearts gone wild with war,  
There is hunger in the city and famine on the plain.***

***Come Lord Jesus, the light is dying,  
The night keeps crying, come Lord Jesus.***

***What demands a hearing in far many lands,  
The sick go untended, death deals a heavy hand,  
The dreams of men are empty, their cup of sorrow full.***

***Come Lord Jesus, the light is dying,  
The night keeps crying, come Lord Jesus.***

**Fr. Martin Eke, MSP**