



The Holy See

FEAST OF ST STEPHEN PROTOMARTYR POPE FRANCIS

ANGELUS

Saint Peter's Square

Tuesday, 26 December 2017

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning!

After celebrating Jesus's birth, today we celebrate the heavenly birth of Saint Stephen, the first martyr. Even if at first sight, it may seem that there is no connection between the two events, in reality there is, and it is a very strong one.

Yesterday, in the liturgy of Christmas, we heard proclaimed: "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). Saint Stephen distressed the leaders of his people because, "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5), he firmly believed and professed the new presence of God among the people. He knew that the real temple of God was now Jesus, the eternal Word who came to dwell among us, having made himself like us in every way except in sin. But Stephen is accused of preaching the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem. The accusation they make against him is that of declaring that "this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us" (Acts 6:14).

In effect, Jesus' message is troubling and it disturbs us because it challenges worldly religious power and stirs consciences. After his coming, it is necessary for us to convert, to change our mentality, to stop thinking like before; to change and to convert. Stephen clung to Jesus' message until death. His last prayers were: "Lord Jesus receive my spirit" and "Lord do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:59, 60). These two prayers faithfully echo those uttered by Jesus on the Cross: "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit" (Lk 23:46) and "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (v. 34). Those words of Stephen were only possible because the Son of God came to earth, died and rose for us. Before these events, these expressions were humanly inconceivable.

Stephen implores Jesus to receive his spirit. The Risen Christ, in fact, is the Lord and is the only mediator between God and mankind, not only at the hour of our death, but also in every instant of life. Apart from him, we can do nothing (cf. Jn 15:5). Thus, before the Baby Jesus in the Nativity scene, we too can pray to him in this way: "Lord Jesus to you we entrust our spirit, receive it" so that our life may truly be a good life according to the Gospel.

Jesus is our mediator and he reconciles us, not only with the Father, but also among ourselves. He is the source of love who opens us to communion with our brothers and sisters, to love each other, removing all conflict and resentment. We know that resentment is bad; it causes a lot of pain and does us great harm! And Jesus removes all this and enables us to love one another. This is the miracle of Jesus. Let us ask Jesus, born for us, to help us adopt this twofold attitude of trust in the Father and love of neighbour. It is an attitude which transforms life and renders it more beautiful, more fruitful.

To Mary, Mother of the Redeemer and Queen of Martyrs, let us lift our prayer with confidence, that she may help us to welcome Jesus as Lord of our lives and to become brave witnesses, ready to pay in person the price of our loyalty to the Gospel.

After the Angelus:

Dear Brothers and Sisters, in the spirit of Christian joy which flows from the birth of Jesus, I greet you and thank you for your presence.

To all of you who have come from Italy and from various countries, I renew my wish for peace and serenity. May these be days in which you and your families can enjoy the beauty of being together, feeling that Jesus is in our midst.

A particular greeting goes to the faithful of the Ukrainian national pilgrimage. I bless all of you and your country.

In these weeks I have received many messages of good will. As it is not possible for me to reply to each of them, I express my sincere gratitude to all of you today, especially for the gift of prayer. A heartfelt Thank you! May the Lord reward you with his generosity!

Happy feast day. Please do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch! *Arrivederci!*

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