

Seventh Sunday of Easter – Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit

Stephen is Martyred



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Introduction

The most frequent way of praying that Saint Ignatius uses is that of imagining ourselves in a Gospel scene. We imagine ourselves as a character in the story. We take part in the story, seeing Jesus and all the other people, being aware of what's going on and how we are feeling. The purpose of praying with the imagination is to allow Christ in the Scripture to speak to us. To bring the Gospel stories to life for us. We are not trying to recreate history. It doesn't matter if your imagination takes the story off in a different direction to the Scripture. It doesn't matter if the story takes place in 1st century Palestine or where we live now in the 21st century. What is important is what God wants to say to us through this passage.

Sit and relax by focussing on your breathing for a few minutes so that you can contemplate the Gospel using our imagination.

Prayer

Acknowledge you are in the presence of God by saying the following prayer:

Direct O Lord and guide and influence all that is happening in my mind and heart during this time of prayer: all my moods and feelings, my memories and imaginings; my hopes and desires; may all be directed and influenced to your greater glory, praise and service and to my growth in your Spirit. Amen

Let the Spirit guide our hearts and enlighten our minds to the grace of being merciful and forgiving.

Reading Acts 7:55-60

Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at God's right hand. "I can see heaven thrown open" he said "and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." At this all the members of the council shouted out and stopped their ears with their hands; then they all rushed at him, sent him out of the city and stoned him. The witnesses put down their clothes at the feet of a young man called Saul.

As they were stoning him, Stephen said in invocation, "Lord Jesus, Receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and said aloud, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them"; and with these words he fell asleep.

Contemplation

In the first reading of the Seventh Sunday of Easter, we read about the death of Stephen, the first martyr who, like Jesus, dies forgiving those who are killing him. Let us enter the scene and listen to Stephen's vision of heaven and his words of forgiveness.

- Who are you in this scene? Stephen? A member of the council? A friend of Stephen? Saul? A bystander?
- Look around you. What do you see? Look at the faces of the people present. What are their expressions like as they listen to Stephen's vision? One of anger? Confusion? Hate? Shock? Sympathy? Compassion? What about you? What is going on in your mind?
- What is going on in your mind as Stephen tells you he can see heaven thrown open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God? Does it fill you with hope that through Jesus who

walked with us, we have access to the Father? Hope that Jesus intercedes for us? Do you wish that God would grant you such a vision?

- Are you surprised as you watch so-called God-fearing people resort to violence just because they are scandalised by what Stephen is saying? Are you horrified that they are killing in the name of God? Do you ever feel such rage when people do not comply with your way of thinking particularly your religious beliefs?
- Do you see the witnesses put down their clothes at the feet of a young man called Saul? What do you deduce from that? What is Saul like? Do you feel anger with him for being the instigator of such violence? How does such fanatical behaviour make you feel? What emotions arise in you?
- Now look at Stephen? What does his face look like as he tells you of his vision of heaven? An expression of peace? Joy? Love? What about his expression as he is being stoned? What is his voice like as he says “Lord, do not hold this sin against them”? Does this remind you of Jesus’ words of forgiveness as he was being crucified? What does it tell you of forgiveness? Does it reveal to you what loving your enemy really means? Do you think that this violence is overcome by Stephen’s prayer?
- Do you now understand the meaning of Jesus’ words “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven”? With this in mind, do you think Stephen was happy to die on Jesus’ account?

Speak to Jesus about Stephen’s act of forgiveness. Ask him to show us how we can be peacemakers and not be tempted to use anger in the name of God.

End Prayer Suscipe of St. Ignatius of Loyola

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.
You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.
Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.