

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Pray for Enemies and Witness to Truth St. Stephen Saturday, December 26, 2015
8:15 AM **Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59;** Mt 10:17-22 (Enemies need your prayers. This is how we live out the gospel, the faith that Jesus himself embodied and taught. The Holy Spirit will tell us we have to speak to someone the truth.)

Today we celebrate the feast of St. Stephen, the first martyr; so we celebrate his birth into eternal life. The prayers of the opening of the Mass talk about how **we need to learn how to forgive our enemies and to pray for our persecutors**, as did St. Stephen, as did Christ himself on the cross. *like* St. Stephen's dying words were actually a copy of Jesus' dying words, and in a way it is the essence of Jesus' gospel, what makes **Jesus' gospel different from every other faith or religious tradition because it's centered not only on love but love of enemies**. You could look all you want in the Old Testament, you won't find that. You could look in the Qur'an, and you won't find it. You could look at the Sutras and the Upanishads, and you will not find it. It is unique to the teachings of Christ.

The martyrs embody this teaching. But it is something that we also need to embody, even though we may not be persecuted in the sense St. Stephen was. But **we are beset by all kinds of problems and people who don't understand us and who don't accept us for this reason or that, and yet we have to learn to deal with them with love and, yes, they are our enemies**. We do have enemies in life. It's foolish to act as if we don't. People can be inimical. They may not really want our wellbeing. They may not care about us. We have to love them anyway and **we have to pray for them**. I'm sometimes shocked to realize that people do not pray for people they don't like or people they have a grudge against; they just block them out altogether of their memory. Well, this is a big mistake. Those are precisely the people you have to pray for, the people who have hurt you, the people who have neglected you, who have let you down, who have offended you. They are precisely the people, including your own parents or your children or

those in authority over you, your boss. **They need your prayers. This is how we live out the gospel, the faith that Jesus himself embodied and taught.**

Now there is a part of this first reading in the Acts of the Apostles, there's a part missing when **Stephen addresses the Sanhedrin and he does not mince any words.** Jesus says in the gospel not to worry about what you are to say; the Holy Spirit will give it to you. Well, **the Holy Spirit gave it to St. Stephen and it was very sharp.** He did not spare the feelings of the Sanhedrin. He told them that they were rejecting the Holy Spirit, and doubtless they were. They accused him of blasphemy because he was saying their faith was somehow off. But actually **he wasn't condemning their faith; he was condemning their behavior and the behavior of those who went before them.** He says, "What prophet did your fathers not kill?" This is nothing about faith; it's about behavior. And **there is a time when the Holy Spirit will tell us we have to speak to someone the truth, which is not going to be very polite or politic, but true.** This is all part of being a martyr, a witness to Christ.