

Reflection St Stephen - Octave of Christmas 2020

St Stephen, the first Martyr was one of the deacons appointed by the Apostles to organize the distribution of food to the poor. He performed many miracles and confounded the Jews in disputation. They fabricated false charges against him. At his trial he preached the risen Christ to them, so they stoned him to death. He prayed for his persecutors as he was dying. One of them, Saul of Tarsus, who was looking after the cloaks of the stone-throwers, was later converted and became the great missionary St Paul.

St Stephen patron saint of altar servers would have known Jesus and been impressed by the service Jesus showed the poor and destitute, in fact, anyone in need of help. He would have been struck by the warmth and compassion Jesus showed to those he healed and seen the desire to help in Jesus eyes. It was that experience of Jesus as well as his words that inspired Stephen to reach out and help those in need. He would also have been aware of the time Jesus spent in prayer and how that prayer inspired him. This is why Altar Servers are so important. They bring a reverence, dignity and importance to our prayer celebrations - most especially the Eucharist. They can be thought of as John the Baptists because they help keep the way clear for the Lord to come and dwell in our hearts and lives. The fact that he forgave those who stoned him to death showed just how much Jesus influenced his life. Steadfast in faith. Steadfast in Service. Steadfast in compassion and care.

The Pope's message *Urbi et Orbi* appears influenced by the spirit and commitment of St Stephen. Recognising that we are all brothers and sisters across the globe the Pope said: *The unity we seek as brothers and sisters, God made possible by giving us his Son, Jesus. A fraternity grounded in genuine love, where we encounter others who are different, feel compassion for their sufferings, draw near and care for them even if they do not belong to my family, my ethnic group or my religion.*

The Pope asked Jesus to open our hearts *to help the vulnerable, the sick, those unemployed and affected by the pandemic, as well as women who suffered domestic violence during the lockdowns. He called for a spirit of international cooperation starting with health care to ensure all have access to vaccines and treatment.*

In everyone, I see reflected the face of God. In those who suffer, I see the Lord pleading for my help. I see him in the sick, the poor, the unemployed, the marginalised, the migrant and the refugee, just like St Stephen!

One afternoon a Lawyer was driving home when he saw a man, eating grass by the side of the road "Why are doing that?" the lawyer asked. "I don't have any money for food" the man replied. "Oh, then you must come with me". "But, Sir, I have a wife and five children." "They are all welcome". So, the family boarded the lawyer's car and he drove off to his mansion. "You're so kind to help so many people" the wife said. "Oh, that's fine" said the lawyer. **"I haven't cut my grass in weeks".**