

your fathers persecuted? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you have now been the betrayers and murderers, you who received the Law as an ordinance of angels and did not keep it.” (AC 7:51-53)

\*\*\*\*\* (excerpted from www.ststephenschurch.org)

\*\*\*\*\*"They were infuriated when they heard this, and ground their teeth at him.” (AC 7:54). St. Luke inserts Stephen’s speech parenthetically between a transfiguration scene and a related vision. The transfiguration appears in the prelude to the testimony: “The members of the Sanhedrin all looked intently at Stephen, and his face appeared to them like the face of an angel.” (AC 6:15) The related vision is then described at the conclusion of the testimony: “Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at God’s right hand. “Look, I can see heaven thrown open, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” (AC 7:55-56).

Stephen’s angelic countenance is to be understood in terms of the heavenly vision which ratifies what he has spoken. God’s glory is in heaven, with the risen Christ, rather than in the Temple made by humans. The reference to “Jesus standing at God’s right hand” is remarkable for the posture and may signify the Lord’s welcome to his martyr in an individualized parousia, the Lord’s intercession for his confessor, or an indictment against Stephen’s accusers.

At the climax of Stephen’s testimony, Luke’s account shifts from a judicial proceeding to a lynching. “All the members of the council shouted out and stopped their ears with their hands; then they made a concerted rush at him, thrust him out of the city and stoned him.” (AC 7:57-58a) As was the custom, the hostile witnesses had initiated the execution of the sentence. “The witnesses put down their clothes at the feet of a young man called Saul.” (AC 7:58b) Saul, the future apostle Paul, approved of the killing.

The final moments of Stephen’s life are his crowning glory. His last words are those of a true disciple. 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.” (AC 7:59-60)

\*\*\*\*\* (excerpted from www.deacons.net)

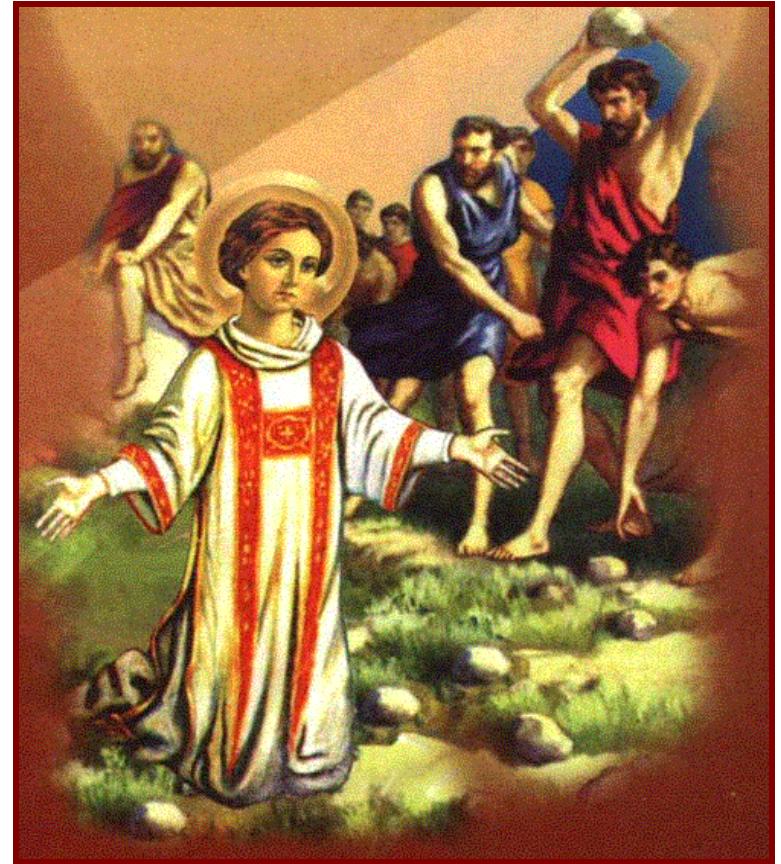
\*\*\*\*\*"There were some devout people, however who buried Stephen and made great mourning for him.” (AC 8:2) The bodies of men stoned to death were to be buried in a place appointed by the Sanhedrin. Whether in this instance the Sanhedrin insisted on its right cannot be affirmed. For centuries the location of St. Stephen’s tomb was lost sight of, until in 415 a certain priest named Lucian learned by revelation that the sacred body was in Caphor Gamala, some distance to the north of Jerusalem. The relics were then exhumed and carried first to the Church of Mount Sion, then, in 460, to the basilica erected by Endocia outside the Damascus Gate, on the spot where, according to tradition, the stoning had taken place.

\*\*\*\*\* (excerpted from: www.newadvent.org)

\*\*\*\*\*"With the death of Stephen, “a bitter persecution started against the church in Jerusalem.” (AC 8:1b) The persecution, in which Saul played a principal role, was directed against the Christian Hellenists. It was this group, "scattered to the country districts of Judaea and Samaria, " (AC 8:1c) that gave the “Church its first missionaries. During this period, the Twelve, along with the Christian Hebrews, still remained in Jerusalem. The only first hand source of information on the life and death of St. Stephen is in the Acts of the Apostles (6: 1-8.2).

\*\*\*\*\* (excerpted from www.deacons.net)

**Saint Stephen**  
**Feast Day December 26th**  
**Patron of Stonemasons**  
**First Christian Martyr**  
**(the Protomartyr)**



***St. Stephen, you were dragged and stoned to death  
for your unceasing faith;  
and still during your martyrdom you prayed for  
the forgiveness of those who condemned you,  
begging the Lord to pardon them for their offenses.  
Beloved Saint Stephen, pray for us, that we may  
live a life of constant preaching and servitude to the children of God.  
May we obtain all the Holy Virtues that you were granted in this life;  
so to glorify God Almighty in the next life.  
Amen.***

## *Saint Stephen*

*\*The name Stephen means “crown,” and he was the first disciple of Jesus to receive the martyr’s crown. He was a deacon in the early Christian Church. The apostles had found that they needed helpers to look after the care of the widows and the poor. So they ordained seven deacons of which Stephen is the most famous. God worked many miracles through St. Stephen. He spoke with such wisdom and grace that many who heard him became followers of Jesus.* \*(excerpted from www.catholic.org)

*\*\*Although his name is Greek (from Stephanos meaning crown), he was a Jew, probably among those who had been born or who had lived beyond the borders of Palestine, and therefore had come under the influence of the prevailing Hellenistic culture. The New Testament does not give us the circumstances of his conversion. He most likely used his talents to win over the Greek-speaking residents of Jerusalem.* \*\* (excerpted from www.ststephenschurch.org)

*\*\*\*A fifth century tradition, says the name Stephanos was only a Greek equivalent for the Aramaic Kelil (Syr kelia, crown), which may have been his original name which was inscribed on a slab found in his tomb. He was not a proselyte, for the fact that Nicholas is the only one of the seven designated as not to be a Jew by birth.*

*H*is ministry as deacon was among the Hellenists converts who the Apostles were at first less familiar; and the fact that the opposition Stephen met which sprang up in the synagogues of the Libertines” (probably the children of Jews taken captive to Rome by Pompey in 63 BC and later freed); hence the name Libertini. He also preached among the Hellenist Jews from the Cyrenians, Alexandrians, Celicia and Asia. \*\*\* (excerpted from: www.newadvent.org)

*\*\*\*The care of the widows and poor was committed to the apostles. It was their responsibility that when the rich sold their estates the money was despoiled in one common treasury to be distributed according to everybody’s necessities. The number of converts being very great the Greeks murmured against the Hebrews, complaining that their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.* \*\*\* (excerpted from: ewtn.com)

*\*\*\*\*The Apostles were informed of these complaints, but they were too busy to deal with the problem. Seven good and prudent men were selected to administer and supervise the caring of the widows and the poor. The seven, on being presented to the Apostles, were prayed over and ordained by the imposition of hands. Associated in these charitable tasks with Stephen, whose name heads the list as “a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit,” were Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicholas—all Greek names. The title of deacon, which came to be linked with their function, derives from the Greek verb meaning “to minister.” These men served the Christian community in temporal and charitable affairs; later on they were to assume minor religious offices.* \*\*\*\* (excerpted from: www.ststephenschurch.org)

*\*\*\*\*\*The “laying on of hands” is a Jewish ritual which expresses both the transfer of functions and the bestowal of powers. It was also an ecclesiastical practice in Luke’s own time (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6). Luke does not call the chosen seven “deacons” but the term may have been applied to “diaponia” (rendered “distribution” in V.1 and “service” in V.4).*

*As early as the year 95, the institution of bishops and deacons is seen as the first fruits of the work of the Apostles (Clement, “The First Epistle to the Corinthians”, ch. 42). It is particularly significant that there is a striking similarity between the functions of the Seven in the distribution of food and the functions of the early deacons. For example, St. Ignatius of Antioch, circa 110, in his Epistle to the Trallians (ch 2) writes: “It is fitting also that the deacons of the mysteries of Jesus Christ should in every respect be pleasing to all. For they are not ministers of meat and drink [only], but servants of the Church of God.”*

*As early as the 2nd century Rome there is a condemnation of “deacons, who discharge their duty ill, and who plundered widows and orphans of their livelihood.” There is also the early belief that the traditional number of deacons at Rome, seven, had Apostolic sanction. Thus Eusebius in “The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine” (Book 6, pg 43), quotes from a letter by Pope Cornelius, C. 250, in which it is noted that there are only seven deacons at Rome. In fact, a canon of the council of Neo-Caesarea (325) prescribed the same restriction for all cities, however large, and appealed directly to the Acts of the Apostles as a precedent.* \*\*\*\*\* (excerpted from www.deacons.net)

*\*\*\*\*\*As a leader, Stephen spoke in public with great vigor. Being an individual who was “full of grace and power, he was working great wonders and signs among the people.” By this time a number of Jewish priests had been converted to the faith, but they still held to the old traditions and rules as laid down in Mosaic law. Stephen was prepared to engage in controversy with them, eager to point out that, according to the Master, the old law had been superseded. He was continually quoting Jesus and the prophets to the effect that external usages and all the ancient holy rites were of less importance than the spirit; that even the Temple might be destroyed, as it had been in the past, without damage to the true and eternal religion. It was talk of this sort, carried by hearsay and rumor about Jerusalem, and often misquoted, intentionally or not, that was to draw down upon Stephen the wrath of the Jewish priestly class.*

*It was in a certain synagogue of Jews “called that of the Greedman, and of the Cyrenians and of the Alexandrians and of those from Cilicia and the province of Asia” that Stephen chiefly disputed. Perhaps they did not understand him and they could not effectively answer his point of view so they fell to abusing him. They bribed men to say that Stephen was speaking blasphemous words against Moses and against God. The elders and the scribes were stirred up and brought him before the Sanhedrin, the supreme Jewish tribunal, which had authority in both civil and religious matters. False witnesses made their accusations...there he was charged with having said that “Jesus...is going to destroy this Place [the Temple] and alter the traditions that Moses handed down to us.” (Ac. 6:10-14)*

*Stephen defended himself ably, reviewing the long spiritual history of his people; finally his defense turned into a bitter accusation. He concluded thus: “Yet not in houses made by hands does the Most High dwell, even as the prophet says...Stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ear, you always oppose the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you also. Which of the prophets have not*