



Jesus said to his disciples: “Beware of men, for they will hand you over to courts and scourge you in their synagogues, and you will be led before governors and kings for my sake as a witness before them and the pagans. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will hand over brother to death, and the father his child; children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all because of my name, but whoever endures to the end will be saved.”

Introductory Prayer: Lord, I open my heart to you on this new day. Because of your unfailing love for me, you deserve my deep gratitude and complete confidence in you, so I set my entire being at your disposal. Do with me what you wish. I know that you love me and that nothing that can truly harm me will happen as long as I keep striving to live in your love.

Petition: Lord, help me to experience your forgiveness and learn to forgive in return.

1. “Do Not Hold This Sin Against Them!” These words of St. Stephen (Acts 7:60) repeat Christ’s last words on earth. He has entered into Christ’s heart. He is on fire for his Lord. This fire is making him pass through the same crucible of rejection and death that Christ passed through. And he is walking in the fire without being scorched. His heart burns so much for Christ that it cannot fester with hatred and despair. Like his Lord, he wants only the salvation of his persecutors. Am I letting my heart to be ignited with the

flame of love that burns in that Child in the manger? Am I showing the zeal of love that is selfless service?

2. The Case of Saul: The Acts of the Apostles records the approval of Stephen's martyrdom by Saul. Saul was a man who thought he understood everything. He thought he knew how evil Stephen was and what a threat his teaching brought. His intentions seemed correct, but he was dead wrong. Saul will later speak of himself as someone born dead. He was dead — dead in his soul — because he had missed the point. Yet God is merciful. Saul soon becomes St. Paul. Jesus accepts the prayer of Stephen just as the Father accepts the prayer of Jesus. We do not need to be afraid. God accepts our prayers, too. He will do marvels if we persevere in prayer and service.

3. Hard of Heart: We're often pushed out of our comfort zone by Christ's message. We are ready to be forgiven by Christ and by others, but it is not so easy to take the logical next step of quickly and easily forgiving others. To become a forgiving St. Stephen we need to keep in mind that we, too, are Saul. The Christmas Season is a perfect time for a change of heart. By contemplating today the loving face of God in that child in the manger we can experience his tender, infinite love for us. Anchored in his friendship we can gain the magnanimity of heart to set aside any ill will from past injuries and desire for everyone to find the peace and joy that only comes from knowing the Word Incarnate.

Conversation with Christ: Lord, thank you for the example of St. Stephen, the first martyr of your young Church. On this day after your birth, you also show me the birth of total courage in love. I believe that I am safe in your arms no matter how hard the difficulties. I believe that you entrust me with your mission. Today I renew the commitment to be faithful to my mission as a Christian and an apostle "till death on the battlefield." Jesus, you are my Lord. I will follow you.

Resolution: Today I will look for the positive side in everyone I meet. I will look beyond their limitations. I will forgive anyone who might offend me.