

LITURGICAL READINGS

Study the Bible each week with the help of the scripture notes in the Bulletin.

"Let us meditate on the gospels. Amidst the confusion of so many human words, the gospel is the only voice that enlightens, draws, comforts, quenches thirst." -- Pope John XXIII

1. Acts 7, 55-60:

Beginning with Acts 6, St. Luke, author of this book, gives us a fairly detailed account of the martyrdom of St. Stephen. It was immediately followed (Chapter 8) by a fierce persecution of the

church in Judea and Samaria, which providentially started the missionary activities in other places.

Chapter 7, from which today's pericope is taken, is a perfect example of the apostolic form of preaching to the Jews, and points up the false interpretations of the Rabbis, who were cultural, religious and political isolationists who twisted scripture to their own bias. Besides, as Christ had so strongly warned the Pharisees, their main fault was that justification in their view consisted in external observance of the Mosaic law, with little regard for an inner renewal. We have the same problem in the Catholic Church today. No one wants inner renewal because it entails the hard work of self-denial and prayer, so external "involvement" is the all important thing for such spiritually lazy and worldly Catholics.

Notice how Stephen was encouraged by a vision of Christ, and like his master publicly asked God to forgive his murderers.

The question may be asked: If the Jews could put Stephen to death, why were they not allowed to execute Christ? The Jews were not allowed by the Romans to put anyone to death. This was reserved to the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate. So Stephen's death was the illegal act of a frenzied mob. Besides, historians are of the opinion that Pilate was in Rome at this time. He had been recalled in 36 A. D. and his successor had not yet arrived.

2. John 17, 20-26:

This is the prayer Christ made at the end of His lengthy discourse at the Last Supper. It was a prayer for all men till the end of the world, who, as a result of the apostolic activity of His church, would believe in Him.

Christ prayed (a) for the unity established by sanctifying grace and which results in the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in the soul of each one; (b) that the unity of love among all believers in Christ may be "a motive of credibility" by which those who are not believers (the "world") may recognize that the Catholic faith and church is the work of God ["By this shall men know you are my disciples, if you have love one for another" John 13, 35]. Unity of faith, hope and charity (love of God and neighbor) is a real miracle and hence

a sign of the divine presence in the church; (3) "that those to whom He gave His "glory" (sanctifying grace and faith) may, because of their adopted sonship, be with Him, Christ, in heaven for all eternity.

In the last Verses 25-26 Christ tells His Father that He has revealed Him to the apostles, and they have believed in Him. He promises to continue His revelation by means of His church till the end of time.

In the light of this beautiful outpouring of love from the sacred heart of Jesus, we should take confidence. The Catholic Church will never fail as she is God's creation, a continuation of Christ teaching and sanctifying till the end.

Note how Christ's prayer was fulfilled in Stephen, love for enemies and fidelity to the end.

3. Revelations Chapter 22, Verses 12-14, 16-17 and 20:

Chapter 22 is called the Epilogue or a summing up of the message of the Apocalyse.

The "bride" is, of course, the new Jerusalem come down from heaven, the Catholic Church.

The message of Chapter 22 is the message of the whole book, namely, that in Christ God has revealed everything to us; He has no more to say. In seeing Christ we see the Father also. Believers in Christ already possess the Kingdom of God, share in His life, are already united to Him by faith and sanctifying grace. This is also the message of John's gospel. By virtue of His death and resurrection Christ is the conqueror over Satan, the spirit of evil. In union with Christ by faith and grace we too are united to God again. We live out the death and resurrection of Christ in ourselves by self-denial, the struggle against moral evil, the striving for closer and closer union with God. For this reason we cannot be at peace with the "world" (in the scriptural sense, the Kingdom of evil); we must expect its opposition, but we cannot be conquered by it since Christ, with whom we are united, has already conquered it. So "fear not, little flock". (Luke 12, 32).