

The First Christian Martyr

Scripture Reading — Acts 7:51-60

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”
Acts 7:59 —

The first Christian martyr, Stephen, understood that God could be trusted as his heavenly Father. Stephen was given the opportunity to witness about Jesus before the Jewish religious council. He called the council members a stiff-necked people, resistant to the work of the Holy Spirit. He accused them and their ancestors of persecuting the prophets. And he charged them with murdering the Righteous One, Jesus Christ.

Eventually the council would listen no more. They rushed at Stephen and dragged him outside the city to stone him. And while they were pelting him with rocks, Stephen prayed. In his darkest moment on earth, he turned to God in trust: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” That sounds like the prayer Jesus himself offered from the cross: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

Stephen’s prayer wasn’t one of panic or fear. It was simply the prayer of one who understood that because God is our perfect Father, we can trust in his care even in the most extreme of life’s circumstances.

In Jesus’ final prayer from the cross, and in Stephen’s prayer, we learn that even in the darkness, confusion, and mystery of our lives we can trust that we are always held safe in our Father’s hand (John 10:29).

Prayer

In my sorrows, in my fears for the future, in the face of my deepest problems, remind me, O God, that you are my perfect Father in whom I can place my full trust. Amen.

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