



POPE: ST. STEPHEN, MODEL OF NEW EVANGELIZATION

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(Vatican Radio) "On St. Stephen's Day, we are called to fix our gaze on the Son of God", and like St. Stephen, deacon and first martyr of the Church "open up our lives to the light that directs us" on life's path, said Benedict XVI in his Angelus reflections this Wednesday. Emer McCarthy reports **Listen:**

Below a Vatican Radio translation of the Holy Father's Angelus reflection this St. Stephens Day

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Each year, on the day after Christmas, the liturgy celebrates the feast of St. Stephen, deacon and first martyr. The book of Acts presents him as a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 6.8 to 10, 7.55); in him the full promise of Jesus recounted in today's Gospel passage is fulfilled, which is that believers who are called to bear witness in difficult and dangerous circumstances will not be abandoned or left defenceless: the Spirit of God will speak to them (cf. Mt 10:20). The deacon Stephen, in fact, worked, spoke and died animated by the Holy Spirit, bearing witness to the love of Christ to the point of extreme sacrifice. The first martyr is described, in his suffering, as a perfect imitation of Christ, whose passion is repeated even in the details. The life of Saint Stephen is entirely shaped by God, conformed to Christ, whose passion is repeated in him; in the final moment of death, on his knees, he takes up the prayer of Jesus on the cross, trusting in the Lord (cf. Acts 7.59) and forgiving his enemies: " Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (v. 60). Filled with the Holy Spirit, as his eyes are about to close, he fixed his gaze on "Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (v. 55), the Lord of all, who draws all to Him.

On St. Stephen's Day, we are called to fix our gaze on the Son of God, who in the joyful atmosphere of Christmas we contemplate in the mystery of His Incarnation. In Baptism and Confirmation, with the precious gift of faith nourished by the Sacraments of the Church, especially the Eucharist, Jesus Christ has bound us to Him and wants to continue in us, through the action of the Holy Spirit, his work of salvation that redeems, enhances, elevates and leads all to fulfilment. Allowing ourselves be drawn by Christ, like St. Stephen, means opening our lives to the light that calls, directs and makes us walk the path of good, the path of humanity according to God's loving plan.

Finally, St. Stephen is a model for all those who want to serve the new evangelization. He shows that the novelty of proclamation does not primarily consist in the use of original methods or techniques, which certainly have their uses, but in being filled with the Holy Spirit and allowing ourselves to be guided by Him. The novelty of proclamation lies in immersing ourselves deeply in the mystery of Christ, the assimilation of His Word and of His presence in the Eucharist, so that He Himself, the living Jesus, can act and speak through His envoy. In essence, the evangelizer becomes able to bring Christ to others effectively when he lives of Christ, when the newness of the Gospel manifests itself in his own life. We pray to the Virgin Mary, so that the Church, in this Year of Faith, sees more men and women who, like St. Stephen, know how to give a convinced and courageous witness of the Lord Jesus

I am pleased to welcome all those present for this Angelus prayer. Today, immediately after Christmas Day, by tradition we celebrate the feast of the first martyr, Saint Stephen the Deacon. Like him, may we be blessed by God's grace to have the courage to speak up and to defend the truth of our faith in public, with charity and constancy. God bless all of you and your loved ones!