

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Dec 26th 2018

Feast of Saint Stephen, first martyr

For those who follow the liturgy closely, the Feast of Saint Stephen comes as something of a shock immediately on the heels of Christmas Day. It is clearly a “frame” for the Solemnity of Christmas. As such it provides a kind of key for interpreting how the Church understands the Mystery of the Incarnation and its consequences in the human condition.

For many Christians their operative theology is that they follow Jesus Christ, much the way that the Jews follow Moses or Muslims follow Muhammed – that is a very holy man who has been gifted by God to show people how to serve God by their own dedicated life. The Christian Tradition, however, has from its earliest understanding of the Incarnation recognized the God became human so that humans could become divine IN GOD – that is, not on our own terms – which is the great sin of humanity to try to be God on our own terms, not willing to be drawn into God’s existence and be Divinized as God desires us to be in the fullness of our human condition – not above it, or apart from it. The subtle, but critically clear message is that God creates humans as humans to be sacraments of the Divine in the world.

Because we are created in the image of God, however, we have wills that allow us the freedom to choose away from God’s desires.

So what does this have to do with the baby in the manger or the adult Stephen being stoned to death for preaching this truth about Jesus, that baby in the manger? Just this – when we really do what God wants we encounter the light and joy of God – we see God in the world around us. When we live according to God’s desires we are genuinely happy, and able to serve the needs of those who suffer and are lost. BUT those who want to be god on their own terms hate us and seek to destroy us – with stones of one kind or another.

The invitation of today’s readings is to enter into the gift of Christmas – that is an embrace of God’s willingness to be fully human – so that we can become all that God intends us to be, agents of God’s presence in the world – participants in Christ with Jesus as our head – not a separate leader that is nice to follow (at a distance perhaps) but within the Christ life, moved by God’s Spirit to effect Justice and Reconciliation through the practices of Mercy.

May the Journey be a blessed one for each of us, may we keep our eyes on Christ even while the stones fall around us.

With Stephen let us cry: Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

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