

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Apr 15th 2013

Today's readings are both preparatory for tomorrow's: the martyrdom of Stephen and the discourse of Jesus on Himself as the Bread of Life. Yet they both have a common message of their own. I would put it this way: how we LOOK and how we LISTEN determine what we see and what we hear.

Looking and listening objectively are very hard for us humans who tend to see and hear things only through the lenses and hearing aids of our own self-interests, self-pre-occupations, personal concerns, narrow biases, etc. And so, in our first reading, the religious leaders who oppose Stephen cannot even hear the grace and power of his words or see his face "like the face of an angel." And this will lead to them becoming murderers, as well as missing out on the saving mystery of Easter.

Jesus, too, in today's Gospel, points out that in looking for him and listening to him, the crowd totally missed out on the real Good News of eternal life. They weren't really open to His message or even to His presence because they were totally focused on their own immediate concerns and needs, what Jesus rightly identifies as "food that perishes."

So, for us, 2000 years later, a great way to reflect upon, pray over, and flourish from these readings is to examine ourselves, how we look and listen, and recognize, with God's grace what keeps us from seeing and hearing and believing and living the Good News of the Resurrection of Jesus and, thus, missing out on all the signs and wonders that are part of every moment of our post-Resurrection world. Each day let us say, "This is the day the Lord has made, let us be glad and rejoice in it!" And let us look upon each moment, each encounter, each person, each duty, each opportunity, as God's grace in disguise. Let us celebrate the sacrament of the present moment. Let us learn to say "Yes" to what is offered, rather than "No!" For as Fr. Richard Rohr has pointed out so wisely, "Death and no are the same thing, and love and yes are even more the same thing." Then, we will be practicing Resurrection. Then we will be doing what Jesus calls God's work: believing in the One God sent.

Bert Thelen, S.J.