



Daily Reflections

April 17, 2018

Scripture

Acts 7: 51-8: 1

Stephen said to the people, the elders, and the scribes:

"You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears,
you always oppose the Holy Spirit;
you are just like your ancestors.

Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute?

They put to death those who foretold the coming of the righteous one,
whose betrayers and murderers you have now become.

You received the law as transmitted by angels,
but you did not observe it."

When they heard this, they were infuriated,
and they ground their teeth at him.

But Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit,
looked up intently to heaven and saw the glory of God
and Jesus standing at the right hand of God,
and Stephen said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened
and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

But they cried out in a loud voice,
covered their ears, and rushed upon him together.

They threw him out of the city, and began to stone him.

The witnesses laid down their cloaks
at the feet of a young man named Saul.

As they were stoning Stephen, he called out,
"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Then he fell to his knees and cried out in a loud voice,
"Lord, do not hold this sin against them";
and when he said this, he fell asleep.
Now Saul was consenting to his execution.

Our Scripture Reflection

While we shudder at the very thought of being martyred for our faith, those who underwent glorious martyrdom received special Graces as it happened. In today's text, Stephen near death utters almost the same identical words that Jesus said from the cross, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." To love rather than to hate those who hurt us is a Grace from God.

Food for your Journey

James "Jimmy" Covell and his wife, Charma, were American missionaries serving at Kanto Gakuin University in the 1930s when the Asia/Pacific war began to escalate. ... The Covells became two of 18 American missionaries serving on the central island of Panay about 350 miles south of Manila in the Philippines. Shortly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 the missionaries on Panay held a meeting in Iloilo City to consider what they should do. They decided to return to their respective locations and carry on as long as possible

The 11 missionaries and one child that remained, along with three miners and two children, scattered when the Japanese soldiers arrived. The women and children were overtaken, though, and all surrendered.

They were told that they would be put to death the next day. Jimmy Covell pleaded with the soldiers in Japanese. The leader of the battalion, Tai Watanabe, seeming to be influenced by the appeal, radioed his headquarters for orders.

The answer came about noon the next day, December 20, insisting that the mandate be carried out. The Covells insisted that they had nothing to do with the war, but the soldiers would not listen. Finally, the missionaries asked for time to pray. This request was granted. The little group formed a circle and prayed together. After about an hour the missionaries came forward, singing a hymn and saying they were ready. One by one, each adult was led to the mountaintop and beheaded. The children were stabbed to

death

Many Filipinos who protected their American sisters and brothers went on to become strong leaders in the Convention of Philippine Churches. They became pastors, teachers and engineers; one became the general secretary of the Convention. For each of them the suffering and sacrifice of their American friends became a deep inspiration for their service to God.

--Roberta Stephens and Ann Borquist, "From suffering and sacrifice comes JOY:

the story of the Covell family,"

A Prayer from the Heart

Dear Jesus, St. Stephen followed Your example by forgiving those who were killing him. How quick I am to seek revenge against those who simply speak ill of me! Help me to follow the example You have given and that St. Stephen followed. May I show love towards those who seek to do me harm. In doing so may I convert their hardened hearts. Amen