



# Daily Reflections

**December 26, 2016**

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## Scripture

**Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59**

Stephen, filled with grace and power,  
was working great wonders and signs among the people.  
Certain members of the so-called Synagogue of Freedmen,  
Cyrenians, and Alexandrians,  
and people from Cilicia and Asia,  
came forward and debated with Stephen,  
but they could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke.  
When they heard this, they were infuriated,  
and they ground their teeth at him.  
But he, 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 he 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."

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## **Our Scripture Reflection**

Today's text gives us the story of the stoning of the first martyr, Stephen. Like his Lord before him, Stephen's last words echo those from the cross, "Into Your hands I commend my spirit." But why do we remember a martyr the day after we celebrated with such joy the birth of our Savior? Does it not seem out of place, to say the least? Actually, no. Today's feast is an ominous reminder that those who dare follow the baby may be called to do so all the way to the cross.

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## **Food for your Journey**

Dying for Christ seems almost surreal to most Westerners. We live in a part of the world where Christianity rarely makes the news unless it is to be mocked or defamed. Otherwise, the media is strangely silent about modern Christian martyrdom. "Three things distinguish anti-Christian persecution and discrimination around the world," said Denver's Archbishop Charles Chaput to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. "First, it's ugly. Second, it's growing. And third, the mass media generally ignore or downplay its gravity." ...

The secular West has been looking the other way for a very long time. Even the average church-going Christian is not likely to know that 45.5 million of the estimated 70 million Christians who have died for Christ did so in the last century. For this reason, scholars such as Robert Royal, president of the Faith and Reason Institute in Washington, D.C., and author of *The Catholic Martyrs of the Twentieth Century*, refer to the past century as one of the darkest periods of martyrdom since the birth of Christianity.

--Susan Brinkmann, "The greatest story never told: Modern Christian martyrdom," Catholic Online Website, catholic.org.

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## **Prayer from the Heart**

Dear Jesus, As I walk with You, please give me the Grace to follow courageously wherever You lead me. May I give faithful witness to You, despite the cost. Amen.