

VISIONS, LOCUTIONS AND PRAYER

In the seventh chapter of the Acts of the Apostles Saint Luke gives us an account of the first martyr among the early believers in Jesus as the Christ. It is probably five or six years after the death and resurrection of Our Lord. Things are heating up in many Jewish communities because some Jews believe that Jesus was the Messiah and that he did indeed rise from the dead. Others in the Jewish community think that these stories are made up and have no basis in reality. Tempers flare from time to time. Anger is in the air.

The Religious leaders start to attack those Jews who believe in Jesus. They put such disciples in jail. Christians begin to feel threatened. Or sometimes in the heat of the moment some of the followers of the Jewish religious leaders take the law into their own hands and decide what should happen to a person they think is blaspheming the living God. In today's reading they stone Stephen to death because he claims to have seen a vision of this Jesus coming on the clouds of heaven. Claiming that doesn't seem to us to be important enough to lose your life over. But when someone feels their anger is righteous or even from God they can feel justified in doing almost anything. When we believe that this particular person is evil, we often feel justified in doing whatever we can to neutralize this person and mitigate his influence. While these kinds of things went on two thousand years ago, they continue to go on today. Christians are persecuted for what we believe about Jesus still. Are imprisoned still. Are persecuted still. Are killed violently still in many parts of the world. Even here in the United States.

Stephen has a vision and pays for it with his life. In the Book of Revelation, John says that he hears a voice of the Risen Christ. What price will have to be paid for that? Jesus says: "I am coming soon." When? How soon is soon? Today? Tomorrow? Next Week? When? We do not know. But the question is whether we are ready when the risen Lord comes to call us by name. He knows our names. He knows all about us. But when will he come again? It has been two thousand years. Will there be another two thousand? And why does Our Lord allow these persecutions to continue? Why does he not just bring them to a sudden end? We have questions like this even though we know that the Lord does not have to answer to us or explain himself to us.

And then in the gospel we hear his prayer from the heart at the Last Supper with his closest disciples. And what does he ask of his Father? He prays for us to be united, to be one. To be as united with Him as He is with the Father. Jesus knows. He sees the divisions, the separations, and the estrangement. Jesus knows that relationships break down. Marriages come to an end. Families undergo painful separations and even experience abuse of various kinds. He prays for it to end, he prays for there to be a real oneness—of us with each other, of us with Him and with the Father. He prays for the unity that the Holy Spirit will bring. He

prays for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit now that he has returned to his Father. That is next week, at Pentecost.

My friends, we have to help each other to remain hopeful. We have to encourage each other to be patient, to continue to make the sacrifices that life demands of us. We have to pray for the grace to remain true. We have to pray for each other to remain faithful. The Lord lets us see sometimes like he did with Stephen. And he lets us get a glimpse like he did with John. But we have to help each other because we will not be able to be successful if we go it alone. In this Eucharist may our prayer be for true unity in our personal lives, our families, our community, in our country and our world. And let us ask for the unity to come from the Bread of Life.