

Acts 7:55-60ⁱⁱ

But filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died.

ⁱⁱ About the First Reading: Acts 7:55-60

Luke records in detail the death of the first Christian martyr, Stephen. The early Christians first enjoyed "the goodwill of all the people" (2:47), but soon the community's size attracted considerable attention, some positive and some negative.

Those who resisted the growing Christian community latched on to its unique teachings and used them as weapons against Stephen. Stephen understood that faith in Jesus would eventually change the traditional forms of worship. This forceful teaching stirred up the anger and jealousy of his opponents.

The final straw came when Stephen declared that he saw Jesus standing at God's right hand. Stephen's audience understood the enormous significance of this claim and resisted it, fulfilling Stephen's description of their nature (7:51-53).