

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Dear Parishioners,

A few years back I was struck by the fact that there is not a prayer to Jesus Christ that is taught to everyone in the Church. For that matter, we don't have a prayer to the Holy Spirit that everyone learns. But that's a subject for another day. There is a prayer that Mother Teresa of Calcutta wrote to Jesus which has become a favorite of mine. We have been teaching it to the children in our school for several years now. It is printed below. Also below, you will find an article about the first known prayer to Jesus which is found in the Acts of the Apostles. As the author of the article points out, this first prayer to Jesus teaches us a lot about how we should pray to our Lord.

With my prayers,
Father Conley

What the Story of the First Prayer to Christ Teaches Us by [Stephen Beale](#)

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Because the gospels offer a contemporary portrayal of Christ's life, they make a necessary but surprising omission: accounts of prayer to Jesus.

That wouldn't make sense, of course, while He was still on earth. So we are left with the rest of the New Testament to fill in the gap for us. Except that most of the other books are not historical accounts but letters from St. Paul, among others. There's also the Book of Revelation, but that is in a category all by itself. That leaves the Book of Acts as the only biblical history of the early Church. And it is there we find the first official story of a prayer to Christ.

“When they heard this, they were infuriated, and they ground their teeth at him. But he [St. 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 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.” 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 (vv. 54-60).”

The circumstances of this prayer are certainly extraordinary — St. Stephen is martyred, and his killing is, moreover, overseen by a future saint and author of most of the New Testament, St. Paul! Nonetheless this account contains lessons that are applicable to our own

present-day circumstances. If we are to take St. Stephen's prayer as model for our own, here are elements we should seek in our own devotional lives.

Be filled with the Holy Spirit

Notice how the Holy Spirit is at the beginning of St. Stephen's exchange with Christ. In the Bible, the Holy Spirit is always the one who makes the Word of God known to us. The Church teaches that it was He who spoke through all the prophets and writers of Scripture. And, in the New Testament, Christ was conceived in Mary through the Spirit. Today, it is the Spirit who makes Christ present in the Eucharist. So it is fitting that it is through the Spirit that our words—our prayer—is brought to God. Just as He brings God to us, so also the Spirit carries us to God.

Direct your gaze to heaven

The above story contains a simple yet profound detail: before Stephen saw Christ enthroned in heaven he was *looking* for Him. As the author of Acts puts it, he ‘looked up intently to heaven.’ A more literal translation would be that he was looking *into* heaven. *Seek and you will find*, Christ said. But you can't find what you aren't seeking. Stephen knew where to look, so to speak: he was properly disposed for the vision that he received. We can read this allegorically in two ways. First, when we pray, we should recognize the primacy of the eternal and heavenly over the temporal and earthly. *Our Father, who art in heaven*. Second, we should also make our prayer an act of looking for Christ.

We can also infer two practical lessons from this. First, it is good to visualize Christ when praying. Icons are a helpful aid for this. Second, even if we are bowed downwards in prayer, it might help to mentally visualize ourselves—our minds, hearts, and whole being—as stretching upwards towards Christ in heaven (although heaven is not physically above us, it is helpful to think of it in this way). In fact, the literal meaning of the root word for the verb translated as looked up intently means to stretch.

Delight in your vision of Christ

As soon as St. Stephen sees Christ enthroned, he joyfully proclaims it, sharing it with those around him. Prayer draws us up to God but it also should push us outward to our fellow man. Prayer stretches us and expands the circle of our love beyond the self to others around us. Love of neighbor and love of God come hand in hand.

Prayer is Trinitarian

Notice how the vision makes this a Trinitarian event. Stephen is filled with the Holy Spirit and then sees Christ at the right hand of God the Father. Prayer is a form of participation in the Trinity's own internal dialogue. The Word Incarnate has given us the words that form the template for all prayer—the Our Father—to which we address to God the Father, directing our words and hearts to Him through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Complete trust

Stephen is facing physical harm and death, but his attention is all directed towards heaven. He is living out the gospel story of Peter walking on the storm-tossed seas. Unlike Peter, he does not look down, but keeps his gaze fixed on Christ. Prayer should always be an act of trust: even if we don't live up to the high standard Stephen sets for us, we should at least aim for it.

An act of martyrdom

Stephen's prayer coincides with his martyrdom. How can we make our own prayers self-sacrifices to God? At a minimum, we should be making small sacrifices with our time to pray to God. Beyond that, we should be sacrificing our own self-interest and our own plans for our lives and subordinating them to God's plan for us. *Thy will be done.* One way to make prayer time more sacrificial is to make a point of 'offering up' whatever suffering we are experiencing. Or we could even offer up our work. One prayer that can show us how to do this is the [Morning Offering](#) to the Sacred Heart.

A prayer for mercy

Just like Jesus, Stephen prays for God to have mercy on those taking his life. His profound encounter with God has led Him to an incredible act of mercy: praying that those committing murder—against his person—be forgiven. At no point during his prayer is Stephen concerned with the one person most people in his situation would be: himself. Instead, he is focused on God and his neighbors—who in that moment are also his murderers. *Forgive us our trespasses.*

Prayer to Jesus

Jesus, You are the Word to be spoken. Jesus, You are the truth to be told. Jesus, You are the way to be walked. Jesus, You are the light to be lit. Jesus, You are the life to be lived. Jesus, You are the love to be loved. Jesus, You are my life. You are my only love. Jesus, You are my all and all. Jesus, You are my everything.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

PRAYER GROUP MEETING THIS THURSDAY

Our Prayer group meets this Thursday from 6:30 to 8:30 and dinner will be served. Everyone is invited to come and join us for Spirit-filled praise and worship of our Lord. If you can join us please contact Father Conley at frconley@comcast.net

KNOW OF PARISHIONERS WHO ARE

HOMEBOUND? Please contact Fr. Conley or Sister Theresa at the rectory so we can minister to their spiritual needs.

LOYOLA ON THE POTOMAC**A Jesuit Retreat House**

60th Anniversary Luncheon Cruise
Aboard the Spirit of Washington
600 Water St., SW, Washington, DC 20024
Sunday, August 12, 2018
Boarding time: 10:45 am
Cruise time: 11:30 - 1:30 pm
Bountiful Luncheon Buffet, Cash bar
DJ Entertainment, Raffles
Tickets must be purchased from Loyola on the Potomac
\$75.00 Reservations/Tickets
Contact Alice Case at (301) 392-0819 or
alice.case@loyolaretreat.org

September will feature our **Annual Crab Feast (September 9)** and then on September 14, our good friend, Father Frank Kaminski, S.J. will return to Loyola on the Potomac to lead us in a **Day of Prayer – “We Glory in the Cross of Christ.”**

Please support our advertising sponsors. This week we recognize Nick's of Clinton

MASS INTENTIONS FOR THIS WEEK:

SUN: 8am Gabriel DiGiovanni, 10am Maurice Long, Sr., 12N: Parishioners, **MON:** 8am Larry Wood, **TUES:** 8am Betty Sasso, **WED:** 8am NO MASS, **THURS:** 8am Donald Pobst, **FRI:** 9:30am Rev. Arnold DePorter, **SAT:** 9am NO MASS, 4pm Paul Istvan.

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR DAILY

PRAYERS: Stephen Balenger, Mary Bowes, Bill Branick, Deacon Gene Burroughs, Brenda Callahan, Frances Card, Joe Cross, Agnes Curtis, Chuck Davis, James S. Dorsey, Kendall Farrell, George Fassel, Arlene Gandolfi, Martha Gehring, James Gibson, Zynae Green, Judy Istvan-Windsor, Irma Johnson, Regina Kijesky, Marie Knobel, Lillian Komar, Susie Logan, Jim Middleton, Mary Emma Middleton, Larry Miller, Joseph Mona, Wayne Mullings, Ryan Myers, Joseph Quade, Mary Reeves, Sylvene Savoy, William Leon Savoy, Edna Sweeney, Eva Washington, Beth Weise, Tim Welch, Brice Zimmer.