Liturgy of the Hours

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Office of Readings

December 26, 2026

{ Feast – Stephen, First Martyr }

Liturgy of the Hours
EBREVIARY

Stand and make sign of cross

God, come to my assistance.

— Lord, make haste to help me.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit:
as it was in the beginning, is now,
and will be for ever. Amen. Alleluia.

Hymn

With honor let us celebrate
the Martyr Stephen's solemn feast:
the first to fight for Christ and win
the gleaming palm of victory.

This faithful Martyr, in dispute
with false, deceitful witnesses,
saw Jesus, who in glory stood
beside the Father's own right hand.

O noble Martyr, hear our prayer:
be quick and hasten to our aid;
obtain for us the gift we ask:
may heaven's kingdom open wide.

You gleam with high, resplendent light,
for you are cleansed by streams of blood;
remember us, now beg that we
may share the glory you received.

May Christ with mercy grant these gifts,
who, born the Virgin Mother's Son,
now reigns on high for evermore
with Father and with Spirit blest. Amen.

Metrical hymn, melody: St Venantius, 8 8 8 8; Rouen church melody, 1728

Plainsong, mode IV, melody 68; Liber Hymnarius, Solesmes, 1983, Text: Festum celebre martyris, ca. 13th c.*

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Sit or stand

Psalmody

Antiphon 1

Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father.

Psalm 2

The Messiah, king and conqueror

The rulers of the earth joined forces to overthrow Jesus, your anointed Son (Acts 4:27).

Whý this túmult among nátions, *
among péoples this úseless múrmuring?
They aríse, the kíngs of the éarth, *
princes plót against the Lórd and his Anóinted.
"Cóme let us bréak their fétters, *
cóme, let us cást off their yóke."

He who síts in the héavens láughs; *
the Lórd is láughing them to scórn.
Thén he will spéak in his ánger, *
his rége will stríke them with térror.
"It is Í who have sét up my kíng *
on Zíon, my hóly móuntain."

I will annóunce the decrée of the Lórd: †
The Lórd said to me: "Yóu are my Són. *
It is Í who have begótten you this dáy.
Ásk and I shall bequéath you the nátions, *
put the énds of the éarth in your posséssion.
With a ród of íron you will bréak them, *
shátter them like a pótter's jár."

Nów, O kíngs, understánd, *
take wárning, rúlers of the éarth;

sérve the Lórd with áwe *
and trémbling, páy him your hómage
lést he be ángry and you pérish; *
for súddenly his ánger will bláze.

Blessed are théy *
who put their trúst in Gód.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, *
and to the Holy Spirit:
as it was in the beginning, is now, *
and will be for ever. Amen.

Antiphon

Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father.

Antiphon 2

Stephen fell to his knees and cried out in a loud voice: Lord Jesus, do not hold this sin against them.

Psalm 11

God is the unfailing support of the just

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice; they shall be satisfied (Matthew 5:6).

In the Lórd I have táken my réfuge. †
Hów can you sáy to my sóul: *
"Flý like a bírd to its móuntain.

See the wícked brácing their bów; †
they are fíxing their árrows on the stríng *
to shóot upright mén in the dárk.
Foundátions once destróyed, *
what can the júst do?"

The Lórd is in his hóly témple, *
the Lórd, whose thróne is in héaven.
His éyes look dówn on the wórld; *
his gáze tests mórtal mén.

The Lórd tests the júst and the wícked: *

the lóver of víolence he hátes.
He sends fíre and brímstone on the wícked; *
he sends a scórching wínd as their lót.

The Lórd is júst and loves jústice: *
the úpright shall sée his fáce.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, *
and to the Holy Spirit:
as it was in the beginning, is now, *
and will be for ever. Amen.

Antiphon

Stephen fell to his knees and cried out in a loud voice: Lord Jesus, do not hold this sin against them.

Antiphon 3

No one was able to resist the wisdom of blessed Stephen, for the Holy Spirit spoke through him.

Psalm 17

Save me, Lord, from those who hate you

During his life on earth…Jesus prayed to his Father and was heard (Hebrews 5:7).

Lórd, hear a cáuse that is júst, *
pay héed to my crý.
Túrn your éar to my práyer: *
no decéit is on my líps.

From yóu may my júdgment come fórth. *
Your éyes discern the trúth.

You séarch my héart, you vísit me by níght. †
You tést me and you fínd in mé no wróng. *
My wórds are not sínful as are mén's wórds.

I képt from víolence becáuse of your wórd, †
I képt my féet fírmly in your páths; *
there wás no fáltering ín my stéps.

I am hére and I cáll, you will héar me, O Gód. *
Túrn your éar to me; héar my wórds.

Displáy your great lóve, you whose ríght hand sáves *
your fríends from thóse who rebél agáinst them.

Gúard me as the ápple of your éye. †
Híde me in the shádow of your wíngs *
from the víolent attáck of the wícked.

My fóes encírcle me with déadly intént. †
Their héarts tight shút, their móuths speak próudly. *
They advánce agáinst me, and nów they surróund me.

Their éyes are wátching to stríke me to the gróund †
as thóugh they were líons réady to cláw *
or líke some young líon cróuched in híding.

Lord, aríse, confrónt them, stríke them dówn! *
Let your swórd réscue my soúl from the wícked;
let your hánd, O Lórd, réscue me from mén, *
from mén whose rewárd is in this présent lífe.

You gíve them their fíll of your tréasures; †
they rejóice in abúndance of óffspring *
and léave their wéalth to their chíldren.

As for mé, in my jústice I shall sée your fáce *
and be fílled, when I awáke, with the síght of your glóry.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, *
and to the Holy Spirit:
as it was in the beginning, is now, *
and will be for ever. Amen.

Antiphon

No one was able to resist the wisdom of blessed Stephen, for the Holy Spirit spoke through him.

VERSE

Affliction and distress surround me.

— Yet your law is my delight.

Sit

Readings

First reading

From the Acts of the Apostles

6:8—7, 2a, 44-59

The martyrdom of Stephen

Stephen was a man filled with grace and power, who worked great wonders and signs among the people. Certain members of the so-called "Synagogue of Roman Freedmen" (that is, the Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia) would undertake to engage Stephen in debate, but they proved no match for the wisdom and spirit with which he spoke.

They persuaded some men to make the charge that they had heard him speaking blasphemies against Moses and God, and in this way they incited the people, the elders, and the scribes. All together they confronted him, seized him, and led him off to the Sanhedrin. There they brought in false witnesses, who said: "This man never stops making statements against the holy place and the law. We have heard him claim that Jesus the Nazorean will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses handed down to us." The members of the Sanhedrin who sat there stared at him intently. Throughout, Stephen's face seemed like that of an angel.

The high priest asked whether the charges were true. To this Stephen replied: "My brothers! Fathers! Listen to me. Our fathers in the desert had the meeting tent as God prescribed it when he spoke to Moses, ordering him to make it according to the pattern he had seen. The next generation of our fathers inherited it. Under Joshua, they brought it into the land during the conquest of those peoples whom God drove out to make room for our fathers. So it was until the time of David, who found favor with God and begged that he might find a dwelling place for the house of Jacob. It was Solomon, however, who constructed the building for that house. Yet the Most High does not dwell in buildings made by human hands, for as the prophet says:

The heavens are my throne,
  the earth is my footstool;
What kind of house can you build me?
  asks the Lord.
What is my resting-place to be like?
  Did not my hand make all these things?'

"You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are always opposing the Holy Spirit just as your fathers did before you. Was there ever any prophet whom your fathers did not persecute? In their day, they put to death those who foretold the coming of the Just One; now you in your turn have become his betrayers and murderers. You who received the law through the ministry of angels have not observed it."

Those who listened to his words were stung to the heart; they ground their teeth in anger at him. Stephen meanwhile, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked to the sky above and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at God's right hand. "Look!" he exclaimed, "I see an opening in the sky, and the Son of Man standing at God's right hand." The onlookers were shouting aloud, holding their hands over their ears as they did so. Then they rushed at him as one man, dragged him out of the city, and began to stone him. The witnesses meanwhile were piling their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul.

As Stephen was being stoned he could be heard praying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He fell to his knees and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And with that he died. Saul, for his part, concurred in the act of killing.

Responsory

While the Jews were stoning Stephen, God's servant, the heavens opened before him; he saw, he entered in.

— Happy the man to whom the heavens opened.

As the stones crashed upon him, from the depths of heaven the living splendor shone on him.

— Happy the man to whom the heavens opened.

Second reading

From a sermon by Saint Fulgentius of Ruspe, bishop

(Sermo 3, 1-3. 5-6: CCL 91A, 905-909)

The armament of love

Yesterday we celebrated the birth in time of our eternal King. Today we celebrate the triumphant suffering of his soldier. Yesterday our king, clothed in his robe of flesh, left his place in the virgin's womb and graciously visited the world. Today his soldier leaves the tabernacle of his body and goes triumphantly to heaven.

Our king, despite his exalted majesty, came in humility for our sake; yet he did not come empty-handed. He brought his soldiers a great gift that not only enriched them but also made them unconquerable in battle, for it was the gift of love, which was to bring men to share in his divinity. He gave of his bounty, yet without any loss to himself. In a marvellous way he changed into wealth the poverty of his faithful followers while remaining in full possession of his own inexhaustible riches.

And so the love that brought Christ from heaven to earth raised Stephen from earth to heaven; shown first in the king, it later shone forth in his soldier. Love was Stephen's weapon by which he gained every battle, and so won the crown signified by his name. His love of God kept him from yielding to the ferocious mob; his love for his neighbor made him pray for those who were stoning him. Love inspired him to reprove those who erred, to make them amend; love led him to pray for those who stoned him, to save them from punishment. Strengthened by the power of his love, he overcame the raging cruelty of Saul and won his persecutor on earth as his companion in heaven. In his holy and tireless love he longed to gain by prayer those whom he could not convert by admonition.

Now at last, Paul rejoices with Stephen, with Stephen he delights in the glory of Christ, with Stephen he exalts, with Stephen he reigns. Stephen went first, slain by the stones thrown by Paul, but Paul followed after, helped by the prayer of Stephen. This, surely, is the true life, my brothers, a life in which Paul feels no shame

because of Stephen's death, and Stephen delights in Paul's companionship, for love fills them both with joy. It was Stephen's love that prevailed over the cruelty of the mob, and it was Paul's love that covered the multitude of his sins; it was love that won for both of them the kingdom of heaven.

Love, indeed, is the source of all good things; it is an impregnable defense, and the way that leads to heaven. He who walks in love can neither go astray nor be afraid: love guides him, protects him, and brings him to his journey's end.

My brothers, Christ made love the stairway that would enable all Christians to climb to heaven. Hold fast to it, therefore, in all sincerity, give one another practical proof of it, and by your progress in it, make your ascent together.

Responsory

Yesterday the Lord was born on earth that Stephen might be born in heaven;

— the Lord entered into our world that Stephen might enter into heaven.

Yesterday our King, clothed in our flesh, came forth from the virgin's womb to dwell among us.

— The Lord entered into our world that Stephen might enter into heaven.

Stand

Te Deum

You are God: we praise you;
You are the Lord: we acclaim you;
You are the eternal Father:
All creation worships you.

To you all angels, all the powers of heaven,
Cherubim and Seraphim, sing in endless praise:
Holy, holy, holy, Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.

The glorious company of apostles praise you.

The noble fellowship of prophets praise you.
The white-robed army of martyrs praise you.

Throughout the world the holy Church acclaims you:
Father, of majesty unbounded,
your true and only Son, worthy of all worship,
and the Holy Spirit, advocate and guide.

You, Christ, are the King of glory,
the eternal Son of the Father.

When you became man to set us free
you did not spurn the Virgin's womb.

You overcame the sting of death,
and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

You are seated at God's right hand in glory.
We believe that you will come, and be our judge.

Come then, Lord, and help your people,
bought with the price of your own blood,
and bring us with your saints
to glory everlasting.

Concluding Prayer

Let us pray.

Lord,
today we celebrate the entrance of Saint Stephen
into eternal glory.
He died praying for those who killed him.
Help us to imitate his goodness
and to love our enemies.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.

— Amen.

Acclamation

Let us praise the Lord.

— And give him thanks.

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