

THE LIVING  
WORD  
OF  
EASTER

A DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

April 30 - May 6

# SEASON OF EASTER

## *Fifth Sunday of Easter*

### ***Have you ever thought about what your dying words might be?***

The last words of the first Christian martyr were a prayer. As he stood under the stoning of the crowd, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59). This is a simple prayer of absolute trust. My guess is that it was not the first time he prayed such a prayer. He is described in Acts 6:8 as a man “full of God’s grace and power.” One does not have such fullness of grace and power without an open and submitted heart. Because Stephen lived his life as an offering to the Lord Jesus he “performed great wonders and signs among the people.” He was a man who lived the prayer of Psalm 31:5 that Jesus quoted from the cross: “Into your hands I commit my spirit.”

Not only were Stephen’s final words a prayer of trust, but they were also a prayer of forgiveness. As he lay dying, Stephen prayed, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60). This is a simple prayer of absolute freedom. By abiding in the word of his Lord, Stephen had discovered the truth of forgiveness and the truth had set him free (Jn 8:31-32). He did not die cursing his murderers but freely blessing them with forgiveness. He wanted them to experience the freedom he knew in Jesus Christ and he was willing to give his life away for it.

***How does a person come to such a place that their final words are prayers of absolute trust and freedom?*** What Stephen saw at the start of the scene is a clue: Through the power of the Holy Spirit he saw in heaven “the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55). He saw the resurrected Jesus we have been celebrating through the Easter season, the one who conquered death, the one who promised in our Gospel text of John 14 that he would go and prepare a place for us in his Father’s house (v. 2). Stephen knew that though he was being rejected by his fellow Jews, he had been accepted by God, that though he was enduring the worst pain of his earthly existence, he had the promise of eternal life with Jesus who had also endured such trauma. Stephen’s heart was not troubled as



he faced his tormentors, because he knew the truth of Jesus' encouragement for such difficulties: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me" (Jn 14:1).

What we see in Stephen in this moment is someone dying confidently in the identity that Peter describes in his letter. "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Pet 2:9-10).

***I would suggest that Stephen's dying words were what they were because they were the words that he lived by.*** While he may not have said these exact phrases before, he had practiced their truth. The absolute trust and freedom that Stephen experienced is possible for me and you. The wonder of this story is that the one who oversaw Stephen's murder, Saul, would later go on and experience the resurrected Jesus himself and win many to the beautiful trust and freedom of the kingdom. While we may not die at the hands of a crowd, the way we handle our troubles is an opportunity to bear witness to the "witness" of the resurrected Savior.

## FOR reflection

***Are you living with the peace that Stephen showed?  
Do you have the trust expressed in these words from  
Psalm 31:15: "My times are in your hands"?***



# SCRIPTURE

## READINGS FOR THE WEEK

<b>Thursday</b>	Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; Genesis 12:1-3; Acts 6:8-15
<b>Friday</b>	Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; Exodus 3:1-12; Acts 7:1-16
<b>Saturday</b>	Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; Jeremiah 26:20-24; John 8:48-59
<b>Sunday</b>	Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; Acts 7:55-60; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14
<b>Monday</b>	Psalm 102:1-17; Exodus 13:17-22; Acts 7:17-40
<b>Tuesday</b>	Psalm 102:1-17; Proverbs 3:5-12; Acts 7:44-56
<b>Wednesday</b>	Psalm 102:1-17; Proverbs 3:13-18; John 8:31-38

### ***Why do the daily readings begin on Thursday?***

The daily readings for each week begin on Thursday and end on the following Wednesday. The Thursday through Saturday readings prepare the reader for the Sunday ahead. The Monday through Wednesday readings reflect on what was presented on Sunday.

# The Morning Liturgy

## **Opening Scripture**

Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

*Hebrews 9:24*

## **Opening Prayer** (based on Psalm 51)

Open my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Give me the joy of your saving help again and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.

*Amen.*

## **Scripture Reading** (read Psalm and Gospel text here)

## **Period of Silence**

## **Confessing Our Faith** (Apostles' Creed)

## **The Lord's Prayer**

## **The Collect** (Fifth Sunday of Easter)

*Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.*

*Amen.*

## *A Midday Prayer*

Blessed Savior, at this hour you hung upon the cross, stretching out your loving arms. Grant that all the peoples of the earth may look to you and be saved; for your mercies' sake. *Amen.*

## *An Early Evening Prayer*

Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past; be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread. Grant this for the sake of your love. *Amen.*

## *A Bedtime Confession and Prayer*

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your name. *Amen.*

*Visit this place, O Lord, and drive far from it all snares of the enemy; let your holy angels dwell with us to preserve us in peace; and let your blessing be upon us always; through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*





