



Christian Art

Daily Gospel Reading and Art Reflection

Matthew 10:17-22

Saint Stephen's Day



The Martyrdom of Saint Stephen,
Painted by **Annibale Carracci (1560-1609),**
Painted between 1603 and 1604,
Oil on copper
© Louvre Museum, Paris

Daily Gospel Reading

Matthew 10:17-22

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Beware of men: they will hand you over to sanhedrins and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the pagans. But when they hand you over, do not worry about how to speak or what to say; what you are to say will be given to you when the time comes; because it is not you who will be speaking; the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you.'

'Brother will betray brother to death, and the father his child; children will rise against their parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all men on account of my name; but the man who stands firm to the end will be saved.'

Reflection on the Painting

Today we celebrate St Stephen, the first Christian martyr. According to the Acts of the Apostles, he was a deacon in the early Church in Jerusalem. With his teachings he made quite a few enemies in the synagogues. Accused of blasphemy, at his trial, he made a long speech denouncing the Jewish authorities who were sitting in judgment on him and he was then stoned to death. His martyrdom was witnessed by Saul of Tarsus, commonly known as Saint Paul.

In our painting by Annibale Carracci, we see Saint Stephen saying his final words, outside the walls of the city. The martyr is already on his knees and bleeding. He pays no attention to the men who are about to stone him, but he already graciously looks up to the angel who is floating towards him bearing the crown and palm, symbols of the martyr. The angel is a celestial messenger sent from the from golden realms of heaven which we can see in the top right corner, which reveal a glimpse of God and Christ looking upon the whole scene... and to witness his martyrdom.

It may seem strange that we celebrate the martyrdom of Saint Stephen the day after Christmas, when we are still immersed in the joys of celebrating the birth of Christ, yesterday. But that is exactly what our faith is. It is not an emotion, but it is a deep peace and love for Christ which is still there in the midst of trials tribulations and in the face of death. It reminds us that this is exactly why Christ came on earth yesterday... to save us from our sins by dying for us on the cross...