

“Don’t shoot the messenger.” Isn’t that how people usually deliver bad news? “Don’t shoot the messenger.”

Today is the Feast Day of Saint Stephen, the first martyr, and one of the first deacons of the Church.

In the appointing of the first deacons, the Apostles sought out men who were “deeply spiritual and prudent.”

And Stephen, after his ordination by the laying on of hands by the Apostles, went out among the people and “worked great wonders and signs among” them.

Yet there were those who chose instead to argue with him, yet “they proved no match for” Stephen’s “wisdom and spirit.”

So, his opponents hired people to lie about what Stephen said.

And when Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrin, in his own defense, he said:

“You stiff-necked people ... Was there ever any prophet whom your fathers did not persecute? ... You who received the law through the ministry of angels have not observed it.”

And then the mob, “as one man, dragged him out of the city,” and stoned him to death.

Saint Stephen, the messenger of the Good News of Salvation in Jesus Christ, was stoned for it.

There are three things that can be taken from what is recorded in the Holy Scriptures about Saint Stephen and how he died.

*How conformed are we to the Will of God?* Where in our lives are we still holding back? Where are we “stiff-necked” when we know which way God has chosen for us, yet we fight the urge to follow His gentle call in our hearts? Do we conform our wills to God’s Holy Will in all things?

*How well do we listen to the message of the Gospel?* Are we open to hearing the Word of God in all areas of our lives and conduct? In what circumstances do we stop up our ears and only hear what it is we want to hear? Are we seriously listening to what is spoken in the Word of God?

*How willing are we to receive and act on the grace of God?* Are there any places in our hearts where we choose sin over grace? Where have we held back on receiving the graces that flow so abundantly from the Sacraments, from this altar, from God; and chosen perhaps our own power?

Because only when we are truly “deeply spiritual and prudent;” full of God’s “wisdom and spirit” ... Only when we are truly conformed to God’s most Holy Will; hearing His Word with open ears and open hearts ... only when we recognize our own neediness and receive the gifts of God ... then, my dear People of God ... and only then can we live the Good News we have received and as messengers of the Gospel ... bring it to a world which so desperately needs it.