



# Saint of the Week

## St. Stephen, First Martyr

First Century

Feast Day—December 26

Christianity's first martyr was probably a Greek Jew. Stephen's story is recounted in the Acts of the Apostles. He was among the first seven deacons chosen to serve the Hellenist Christian community in Jerusalem. But the wonders he worked rattled local Jewish leaders. Witnesses at his trial before the Sanhedrin gave false testimony, and Stephen defended

himself with a stirring speech recalling the long history of Israel's relationship with God and calling the Jews "stiff-necked people" who "always oppose the Holy Spirit." As he was stoned to death outside the city, he cried out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He is the patron of bricklayers, stonemasons and numerous individual Christian churches.



“ Just as Jesus on the Cross entrusted himself to the Father without reserve and pardoned those who killed him, at the moment of his death St Stephen prayed: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”; and further: “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (cf. Acts 7: 59-60). Stephen was a genuine disciple of Jesus and imitated him perfectly. With Stephen began that long series of martyrs who sealed their faith by offering their lives, proclaiming with their heroic witness that God became man to open the Kingdom of Heaven to humankind. ”

— Pope Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, December 26, 2005



Catholic  
Current

Quote from Pope Benedict XVI, copyright © 2005, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City State. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

Copyright © 2014, Catholic News Service—United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC. All rights reserved.

Image: *The Stoning of Saint Stephen*, Rembrandt Hamensz. van Rijn, LACMA