

Reading for Weekday in the Third Week of Eastertide

April 21st 2026

First reading

Acts 7:51-8:1a

‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’

In those days: Stephen said to the people and the elders and the scribes, ‘You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.’

Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’ But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul approved of his execution.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 31(30):3c-4. 6ab, 7b, 8a. 17, 21ab. R6a

Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

or: Alleluia.

Be a rock of refuge for me,
a mighty stronghold to save me.
For you are my rock, my stronghold!
Lead me, guide me, for the sake of your name.
Into your hands I commend my spirit.
You will redeem me, O Lord, O faithful God.
As for me, I trust in the Lord.
Let me be glad and rejoice in your mercy.
Let your face shine on your servant.
Save me in your merciful love.
You hide them in the shelter of your presence,
secure from human scheming.

Gospel Acclamation

John 6:35ab

Alleluia, alleluia.

I am the bread of life, says the Lord;
whoever comes to me shall not hunger.

Alleluia.

Gospel

John 6:30-35

‘It was not Moses but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.’

At that time: The crowd said to Jesus, “Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, “He gave them bread from heaven to eat.”” Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’

Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.’

Short reflection on the reading for today

In Acts, Luke compares Stephen’s martyrdom to the passion of Christ. Both of them were tried for blasphemy and condemned by the Sanhedrin. At the moment of death each of them handed over his spirit to God and each prayed for the executioners to be pardoned. Stephen is honoured as the proto-martyr of Christianity, a disciple whose death, modelled on that of Jesus, led straight to heaven.

Stephen’s final moments seemed inglorious to those he left behind. He was sadly missed by the Christian community in Jerusalem, which he had served so generously. Luke reports that now a fierce assault began against the church. All the disciples of Jesus except the apostles scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. Soon afterwards, Saul began his persecution of the church.

That zealous Jew, Saul of Tarsus, fully approved the stoning to death of Stephen, whom he saw as promoting heresy. But Stephen accepted his fate peacefully “filled with the Holy Spirit.” Even when dragged outside the city amid a vortex of hatred, he did not meet anger with anger, or curse those who cursed him. He rose above the fury of the mob by his trust that the risen Lord would strengthen him. Self-possessed, Stephen reasoned with his judges in the Sanhedrin, serenely surrendering himself to the care of the living Lord Jesus.

His last words were, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” In his death he mirrored the trust of Jesus himself, which should be in the hearts of all disciples. The risen Lord continues among his followers today. We have heard him say, “I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never be hungry.” Our union with Jesus in spirit on a daily basis inspires us, like Stephen, to live by his outlook and attitudes. With Stephen we too should pray, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”