

8// HERE FOLLOWETH THE LIFE OF ST. STEPHEN PROTOMARTYR

St. Stephen was one of the seven deacons in the ministry of the apostles. For when the number grew of people converted, some began to murmur against the Jews that were converted because that the widows and wives of them were refused to serve or because they were more grieved every day than the other in service. For the apostles did this because they should be more ready to preach the word of God.

When the apostles saw their great murmur, they assembled them[selves] all together, and said, “It is not right that we leave the word of God for to administer and serve at the tables.” (And the Gloss saith that the feeding of the soul is better than the meat of the body.) “And consider ye fair brethren, men of good renown among you, that be replenished of [filled with] the Holy Ghost and of wisdom, what we shall establish upon this work so that they administer and serve, and we shall be in prayer and preaching.”

And this word pleased to them all, and they chose seven men, of whom the blessed Stephen was the first and the master, and sith [after that] he brought them to the apostles, and they set their hands upon them, and ordained them.

ST. STEPHEN’S PREACHING OUTRAGES THE JEWS

And Stephen, full of grace and strength made great demonstrances and great signs to the people. Then the Jews took him and would surmount him in disputing, and assailed him for to overcome him in three manners, that was by bringing witnesses, by disputations, and by torments. And in every each one of them was aid and help given to him from heaven. In the first, the Holy Ghost administered [assisted] his words; in the second, the angelic face that feared [frightened] the false witnesses. In the third, he saw Jesu Christ ready to help him, which comforted him to his martyrdom.

Stephen is as much to say in Greek as crowned, and in Hebrew example to other for to suffer. Or Stephen is as much to say as nobly and truly speaking, teaching and governing, or as a friend of the widow women; and he was deputed of the apostles to keep the widows. Then he was crowned, for he began first to be a martyr, example for the ensample of his patience and good life, nobly speaking for right noble predication, and well governing for the good enseignments and teaching of widows.

In every battle he had three things; the assault in battle, the aid given, and the victory. And in advising and beholding shortly the history, we may well see all these things.

HIS FIRST BATTLE: DISPUTATION

As the blessed Stephen did many things, and preached oft to the people, the Jews made the first battle to him for to overcome him by disputations. And some arose of the synagogue called libertines, of a religion so named of them that were the sons of them that had been in bondage and were made free, and thus they that first repugned against the faith were of a bond

and thrall lineage, and also they of Cyrenia and Alexandria, and of them that were of Cilicia and Asia, all these disputed with Stephen. This was the first battle, and then he putteth the victory after, and they might not resist his wisdom, for the Holy Ghost spake in him: and when they saw that by this manner they might not overcome him they returned maliciously.

HIS SECOND BATTLE: FALSE WITNESSES

And at the second time because they might overcome by false witnesses, they brought two false witnesses for to accuse him of four blames, and brought him to the judgment. And then the false men accused him of four things, that was of blaspheming of God, in the law of Moses, in the tabernacle, and in the temple, and this was the second battle. And then all they that were in judgment saw the face of St. Stephen like as the face of an angel: and this was by the help of God, and this was the victory of the second battle. For when the false witnesses had all said [spoken], the prince of the priests said to him, What sayst thou?

Then Stephen excused him by order of all that which the false witnesses had said.

And first of the blaspheming of God, saying, “God that spake to our fathers and prophets, that is God of glory. . . .” and praised him in three things after this word *glory*, which is expounded right sweetly. The God of glory is given of glory, as it is said in the book of Kings: “Whosoever shall see [i.e., honor] my name, I shall glorify him.”¹ The God of glory may be said, “containing glory,” as is said in the Proverbs, the eighth chapter, “Riches and glory be with me, the God of glory, to whom glory is due.”² And thus praised he God in three manners; in that he is glorious, glorifying, and to be glorified.

And after he excused him of the blame in Moses, in praising him much, and especially in three things, that is to wit: of fervour of love, for he slew the Egyptian that smote the Hebrew, and of the miracles that he did in Egypt or desert, and of the familiarity of God, when he spake to him many times amiably.

And after this he excused him of the third blame that was in the Law [i.e., the Pentateuch, the Torah], in praising the Law in three manners; first because of the giver, that was God; the second of the minister, which was Moses, that was a great prophet; and the third because of the for it giveth life perdurable [everlasting].

And after, he purged him of the blame of the tabernacle, and of the temple, in praising the tabernacle in four manners, one was because he was commanded of God to make it, and was showed in vision it was accomplished by Moses, and that the ark of witness was therein, and he said that the temple succeeded tabernacle.

THE THIRD BATTLE: TORMENTS

And the blessed Stephen purged him of that which was laid to him, of which the Jews saw they might not overcome him in that manner. And then they took the third battle against

¹ I Samuel 2:30 (Vulgate I Kings 2:30).

² Proverbs 8:18.

him, that they should surmount him by torments. And when the blessed St. Stephen saw this, he would keep the commandment of our Lord, and enforced him to them in three manners; that was by shame, by dread, and by love. First by shame in blaming the hardness of their hearts, and said to them: “Ye contrary alway the Holy Ghost by your hard heads, and hearts not piteous. Like as your fathers that persecuted the prophets, and slew them that showed the coming of God.” And the Gloss saith that in three manners they were malicious. . . .

{Here is a lacuna. The Legend continues its summary of Acts 7. Stephen died August 3, in the same year as the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus. He was buried by Saint Gamaliel and Nicodemus, members of the council who spoke for the Christians. There followed general persecution of Christians in Judea.

MIRACLES OF ST. STEPHEN

{The Legend then cites Augustine’s remarks on miracles of St. Stephen. Six dead persons were raised to life. Flowers that were laid on St. Stephen’s altar had the power to cure the sick. Also,} clothes [cloths] taken from the altar and laid on them that were sick, were a medicine to many.

For as it is said in the eighth chapter of the same book, these flowers taken upon the altar of St. Stephen were laid on the eyes of a woman that was blind, and anon she had again her sight.

The Healing of a Pagan Named Marcial

And also said he in the same book that a man that was master of a city, and was named Marcial, and was a paynim and would not be converted; and it happed that he was strongly sick, and his son in law that was a right good man, came into the church of St. Stephen, and took the flowers, and laid them under the head of his lord; and anon, when he had slept thereupon, on the morning he cried that the bishop should be brought to him, and the bishop was not in the town, but the priest came to him and bade him to believe in God, and baptized him; and ever as long as he lived after he had alway in his mouth, “Jesu Christ receive my spirit.” And yet he wist not that those words were the words that St. Stephen last spake.

The Lady and the Ring

And also he rehearseth another miracle in the same place, that a lady called Petronia had been sick much grievously, and had sought many remedies for to be healed of her malady, but she felt no heal[th]. But in the end she had counsel of a Jew, which gave to her a ring with a stone, and that she should bind this ring with a lace to her bare flesh, and by the virtue of that stone she should be whole. And when she saw that this helped her not, she went to the church of the protomartyr, and prayed the blessed St. Stephen for her health, and anon, without breaking of the lace or of the ring, the ring fell down to the ground, and she felt herself anon all whole.

The Brother and Sister Cursed by Their Mother

Item, the same recounteth another miracle, not less marvellous: that in Cæsarea of Cappadocia, was a lady much noble, of whom the husband was dead, but she had ten children, seven sons and three daughters. And on a time, when they had angered their mother, she cursed them, and the divine vengeance ensued suddenly the malediction [curse] of the mother, so that all the children were smitten with one semblable and horrible sickness on all their members.

For which thing they might not dwell in the country for shame and for the sorrow that they had, and began to go follily through the world. And in whatsoever country they went, ever each man beheld them.

And it happed that two of them, that is to wit a brother and a sister came to Hippo, and the brother was named Paul, and the sister Palladia. And there they found Austin the bishop and told to him and recounted what was happed. Then they haunted the church of St. Stephen by the space of fifteen days, and it was tofore Easter, and they prayed strongly the saint for their health.

And on Easter-day when the people was present Paul entered suddenly within the chancel and put him to prayer by great devotion, and with great reverence tofore the altar, and as they that were there abode upon the end of the thing, he arose up apparently all whole of his trembling. Then St. Austin took him and showed him to the people, and said that on the morn he would tell them the case. And as he spake to the people the sister was there trembling on all her members, and she arose up and entered into the chancel of St. Stephen, and anon she slept, and after arose suddenly all whole, and was showed to the people as was done tofore of her brother, and then graces and thankings were given to St. Stephen for the health of them both.

When Orosius came from Jerusalem he brought to St. Austin of the relics of St. Stephen of whom many miracles were showed and done.

WHY HIS FEAST IS IN AUGUST

It is to wit that the blessed St. Stephen suffered not death on the day of his feast, but it was on the day that his Invention is on, in the month of August. And if it be demanded why the feast is changed, it shall be said when his Invention shall be said. And this may suffice you for this present, for the church will also ordain the feasts which follow the nativity of Jesu Christ, for two causes. The first is to Jesu Christ which is head and spouse, to the end that the accompanies be joined to him, for Jesu Christ spouse of the church in this world adjoineth to him three companies, of which companies is said in the Canticles: My white soul and ruddy, chosen of thousands. The white is as to St. John the Evangelist, a precious confessor, and the ruddy or red is as to St. Stephen the first martyr, and chosen of thousands, is to the virginal St. John company of the innocents. The second reason is that the church assembleth also together, the manners of the martyrs, the same by will and by work, the second by will and not by deed, the third by deed and not by will. The first was the blessed Stephen, the second was in St. John the Evangelist, the third was in saints and glorious innocents which for God suffered passion.

The [iconography of St. Stephen](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

For other saints, see the [index to this Golden Legend website](#).

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