

who rejects the opportunity for his salvation which is offered to him, deadening his mind, heart and soul...

The most wondrous thing in Stephen's case is neither the strength of his word, nor the divine vision he is seeing as he is being judged, nor his endurance in the martyrdom. The most wondrous thing of all is the prayer he addresses, seeking God's forgiveness for his persecutors. Shaken by this example, the sacred Augustine will cry out a few centuries later: "if Steven had not petitioned, the Church would not have had Paul"! At the moment when the persecutors of the gospel preaching, thought that they were crushing one of its most important bearers, unconsciously they were preparing the appearance of another one and furthermore a Preeminent one! The reference to Paul's presence at Stephen's martyrdom is made so they could show how, according to divine providence, Paul becomes a witness of divine events, he adopts Steven's preaching, which acts in his heart with his own vision on the way to Damascus, and essentially is catechized experientially with Steven's example, especially at the moment of the final forgiveness prayer, which takes away the obstacle of sin so that the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit can act later on.

My brethren, at the end of the year, Steven's example, the model of a true Christian, forces us to compare. The conclusions, for our own self.

Archimandrite I. N

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2015 SUNDAY AFTER NATIVITY, Stephen, Archdeacon & First Martyr, Theodore the Confessor, Brothers Theophanes and Poietus, Afterfeast of the Nativity, Theodore, Patriarch of Constantinople**

**TONE OF THE WEEK: Fourth Tone**

**EOTHINON Seventh Eothinon**

**EPISTLE St. Acts of the Apostles 6:8-15; 7:1-5, 47-60**

**GOSPEL Matthew 2:13-23**

**NEXT SUNDAY, JANUARY 3, 2016 SUNDAY BEFORE EPIPHANY, Malachi the Prophet, Gordios the Martyr of Caesarea, Forefeast of the Theophany of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Righteous Genevieve of Paris, Righteous Peter of Atroas, Righteous Akakios the Wonderworker, Righteous Thomais of Lesbos**

**EPISTLE: St. Paul's Second Letter to Timothy 4:5-8**

**GOSPEL: Mark 1:1-8**

**The Apostolic Ministry wishes to all beloved readers of the pamphlet of the Voice of the Lord a good and holy Twelve days and a blessed new year 2016 from the Savior Christ**



**63<sup>RD</sup> YEAR DECEMBER 27, 2015 PAMPHLET # 52 (3265)**

### **THE WORKERS OF THE GOSPEL**

Today's epistle passage, the last of the ending year, does not belong to the series which are read on Sundays, but is presented on account of today's feast of the memory of the holy, glorious Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen. While it is comprised of the description of Stevens' personality, an excerpt of his apology before the Jewish sanhedrin and a presentation of his martyrdom by stoning. The characteristic of the excerpt is the particular respect for Steven, who outperforms other cases of descriptions of martyrdoms, as for example in the martyrdom of James.

The reason for this is given already from the beginning, where Stephen is described as a man "full of faith and power", in other words, not only all flame from a strong faith, but also strong in word, with a gift of eloquence such that it drew the people and convinced them of the truth of the faith! So for this reason with Stephen also, the Christians sermon came out of the courtyard of the Temple, where Peter mainly functioned, it passed through the streets of Jerusalem, entered into all the Synagogues and brought a great stir. For the first time, the Christian preacher was not limited to that which Peter proved, Christ as a Messiah, but he proceeded to the proof of the temporal and not the eternal character of the Mosaic Law, preparing the ground for that which Paul would do later on, to consider, in other words, to consider the Law obsolete, to consider the right of the idolaters implied, that they convert without conditions to the true faith and to validate their acceptance, as equal in honor with the Christian members of the Church who came from a Jewish background!

### **With wisdom and with the spirit"**

One of Stephen's main characteristics was that the promise of the Lord found its implementation in him that "I will give you the mouth and wisdom, which all those who oppose you shall not be able to record or resist" (Luke 21:15)

**Acts of the Apostles 6:8-15; 7:1-5, 47-**

**Prokeimenon. Mode 4**

**Psalm 18.4,1**

**Their voice has gone out into all the earth.**

**Verse: The heavens declare the glory of God**

IN THOSE DAYS, Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, arose and disputed with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. Then they secretly instigated men, who said, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, and set up false witnesses who said, "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us." And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

And the high priest said, "Is this so?" And Stephen said: "Brethren and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, 'Depart from your land and from your kindred and go into the land which I will show you.' Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living; yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length, but promised to give it to him in possession and to his posterity after him, though he had no child.

"But it was Solomon who built a house for him. Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands; as the prophet says, 'Heaven is my throne, and earth my footstool. What house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?'

"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 not your fathers 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 against 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

upon 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 prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

They couldn't resist the wisdom and the spiritual gift, with the enlightenment with which Stephen was speaking!

Wisdom! Not cerebral knowledge and an intellectual haughty approach, but essential knowledge of the divine truths and mysteries, so that he convinces with what he says and makes everyone accept all that he maintained, even if they didn't like it.

Spirit! Not human power and narcissistic self admiration, but enlightenment from God.

Peter's opponents understood that he had the Spirit of God and that this was speaking through Stephen, unrelated to if their stubbornness imposed on them to persist in their rejection and for them to become vain fighters of God.

These are the characteristics of the true sacred preacher, who in the name of God teaches his people infallibly! It's not based only on personal knowledge and capabilities. He strives to become a vessel of divine Grace, so as to teach the wisdom of God in the Holy Spirit from the abundance of his sanctified heart.

### **Sacrifice**

What are the results of Stephen's word? What are the results of the conviction that through him God was truly speaking? What are the results of his presented apology before the sanhedrin of the Jews, in today's reading? The showing forth of the intolerance of every type of fanaticism! Those hearing him, instead of being convinced with a good disposition accepting the preaching of the Kingdom of the Heavens, are offended because their selfishness and aims which they were diligently serving, are offended. So for this reason also, according to the description of the text, they were «stopping their ears», they plugged their ears and rushed against Stephen. This is the constant battle of the truth of God towards the darkness of this age. And the conclusion may seem tragic for the fans of divine truth, in reality however, it is despairing for the enemies of the faith. And this because he who loses, is not whoever upon dying is living the truth and experiencing eternity, but he