

**Jesus' Final Prayer For Unity  
(Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year C)**

**Acts 7:55-60—The Martyrdom of St. Stephen**

1. Stephen: one of “seven men of good repute” (Acts 6:2, 4).
2. Equality with God: “Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56)
3. Blasphemy: Sanhedrin “stopped their ears” and proceed to *stone him* (Acts 7:56)

He who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall be put to death; *all the congregation shall stone him...* (Leviticus 24:16; cf. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 4.202).

4. Christ-Like Martyrdom:
  - a. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59; cf. Luke 23:46)
  - b. "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:60; cf. Luke 23:34)

**Psalms 97—The Lord is King over the Earth**

1. Vision: “all peoples shall see his glory” (97:6-7)

**John 17:20-26—Jesus' Final Prayer for Unity**

1. Apostolic Church: “for those who believe in me through their word” (17:20)
2. Unity: “that they may all be one” (17:21)
3. Trinity: “as you, Father, are in me, and I in you” (17:21)
4. Faith: “so that the world may believe” (17:21)
5. Glory: “the glory which you have given me I have given them” (17:22)
6. Perfect Unity: “that they may become perfectly one” (17:23)
7. Evangelization: “so that the world may know that you sent me” (17:23)
8. Beatific Vision: “to behold my glory... before the foundation of the world” (17:24)
9. Trinity: “I made known to them your name” (17:26)
10. Love: “That the love with which you have loved me may be in them” (17:26)

**Living Tradition**

John Paul II: Jesus himself, at the hour of his Passion, prayed "that they may all be one" (*Jn* 17:21). *This unity, which the Lord has bestowed on his Church and in which he wishes to embrace all people, is not something added on, but stands at the very heart of Christ's mission.* Nor is it some secondary attribute of the community of his disciples. Rather, it belongs to the very essence of this community. God wills the Church, because he wills unity, and unity is an expression of the whole depth of his *agape*. *In effect, this unity bestowed by the Holy Spirit does not merely consist in the gathering of people as a collection of individuals. It is a unity constituted by the bonds of the profession of faith, the sacraments and hierarchical communion...* Christ's words “that they may be one” are thus his prayer to the Father that the Father's plan may be fully accomplished.... *To*

*believe in Christ means to desire unity; to desire unity means to desire the Church; to desire the Church means to desire the communion of grace which corresponds to the Father's plan from all eternity. Such is the meaning of Christ's prayer: "Ut unum sint."* (John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* no. 9)

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection (Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year C)

1. What in particular was it about St. Stephen's words that led them to stone him to death?

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2. What kind of unity does Jesus pray for the night before he is crucified? What kind of Church does his prayer envision?

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### For Further Study

1. William J. Kurz, S.J. *Acts of the Apostles* (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014). An excellent commentary on Acts from a Catholic perspective. Very informative.
2. Francis Martin and William M. Wright, IV, *The Gospel of John* (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015).