

Holy Christmas: 2nd Day December 26

Feast of St. Stephen

A former children's librarian and member of the West Virginia Library Commission, Suzy McGinley, reminded it best in the Charleston Gazette a few years ago - ". . .the (secular and nostalgic) Christmas season started before Halloween and ended promptly on December 25, as the retail establishment has led us to believe. . ."

But on this 2nd Day of Christmas (with ten more until January 6th, Epiphany) the Church is reminded of the first Deacon of the Church and first to be martyred for belief and trust in Jesus the Christ - St. Stephen. He loved Christ more than any human demand or expectation. A bishop of the Church in the 6th century, Fulgentius of Ruspe, Bishop in North Africa, wrote in a sermon on this Feast of St. Stephen:

"This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"
(John 13:35)

The love that brought Christ down from heaven to earth, lifted Stephen from earth to heaven. The love that showed itself first in (Christ), shone forth next in the disciple & martyr. . . In Stephen, love overcame the ferocity of his enemies. . . Love, therefore, is the origin and source of all good things; it is a most excellent defense, the road that leads to heaven. Whoever walks in love can neither stray nor be afraid. Love guides, love protects, love leads to the end. Christ our Lord, brothers and sisters, set up for us this ladder of love, and by it every Christian can climb to heaven. You must, therefore, keep a firm hold on love; you must show it to one another, and by progress in it climb up to heaven. (Fulgentius)

On this second day of Holy Christmas, I thank God for God's love in becoming human and for the love that is exemplified in the life of St. Stephen and for centuries now the service of Deacons in the Church and the world. I was ordained a Deacon in the United Methodist Church in 1973 and ordained Elder in 1977.

I am challenged to love Christ deeper and more faithfully as I seek to love those around me and with whom I come to meet. Love for Christ and each other is so far better and lasting than the retail gifts of a nostalgic and secular observance of Christmas. In these days we go deeper in our experiences of 2020 to reach out to each other in service & love.

William H. Wilson (Bill)+