

WEEKLY REFLECTION

Highlighted in last week's passage as a man "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5a), the deacon Stephen was "doing great wonders and signs among the people." (v.8) But there were those who "could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which [Stephen] was speaking" (v.10), so they secretly instigated men to lay three charges against him: (1) blasphemy against God; (2) against the Law; and (3) against the temple.

Stephen responds with an impassioned speech that exposes the twisted heart of these accusations. As he points back to the history of Israel, to the founding fathers, to Abraham, Joseph, and Moses, he shows them how God was with them every step of the way. But instead of accepting God's undeserved gift of grace and mercy, the Israelites chose to commit various evils—Joseph's own brothers sold him into slavery. Twice the people rejected Moses, sent by God to rescue them from slavery. They even betrayed and murdered His Son, committing the ultimate evil and blasphemy against God.

Stiff-necked people that they are, the Israelites behaved the same way when they first received the Law. Instead of rejoicing at God's gift of instruction, they turned to and worshipped a statue of a golden calf made by their own hands. (v.41) They accused Stephen of blasphemy (v.14), but he points out their failure to receive and keep the Law. (7:53) Similarly, he quotes God's declaration in Isaiah 66: heaven is His throne, and the earth His footstool. (v.49) Who are the Israelites to think that they can put God in a box? Who are they to confine the Lord of heaven and earth to the Temple and its religiousness?

Stephen's words are harsh, but they are meant to encourage reflection and repentance. The Holy Spirit means to convict, not condemn. What will you choose today, church? Will you also be enraged as your heart condition is exposed? Or will you turn to Jesus, and ask for forgiveness and mercy?

QUESTIONS

QUESTION ONE:

Joseph and Moses' stories show us how God is always with us. Although there was evil done towards them, God meant it for good. (Gen. 50:20) Was there a time where there was evil committed or intended towards you, but God turned things around? How did you see God's grace, mercy, and faithfulness towards you displayed?

QUESTION TWO:

In what ways can we find an echo or parallel of Jesus in Abraham, Joseph, and Moses' stories? In what ways is Jesus greater than them all?

QUESTION THREE:

In what ways do you think you might be blaspheming God, (the spirit of) the Law, or putting God in a box? What needs to be changed and / or addressed, and how might you ask for God's help in doing so? How can your group help to keep you accountable through it all?