



## FATHER JOHN MALLEY, O.CARM. DIRECTOR OF CARMELITE MISSIONS

Dear Friend of the Missions,

A Blessed and Happy Christmas to you and to all your loved ones! Your wonderful support of Carmelite Missions has been like a Christmas gift and blessing to me throughout the year. I am very grateful for your part in our **gift-giving**, not only to my own Province's missions in Peru and Mexico, but also to Carmelite missionaries serving in 23 other countries of the Third World.



During the Christmas holidays, I will be visiting our Carmelite Family in the Philippines. This is the only Catholic country in Asia. It has almost the same number of Catholics as we have here in the United States, but there they live on 7000 different islands! I will only try to visit five of these islands during my month's stay.

There are three principal Carmelite groups that I will see on this trip. Each has been supported by our mission office in the past eight years since I have been the director. First, we have helped the formation houses of seminarians and of young women candidates who are being trained to be the priests, catechists and teachers of the future. Fortunately, there are many good vocations to Carmelite priestly and religious life, but so often sufficient funds for their education are lacking.

Secondly, your gifts are also helping our cloistered contemplative Nuns in the Philippines. Like St. Therese, these women seek by their life of prayer and sacrifice to respond to Jesus' first commandment in the Gospel: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength." God is truly first in their lives. In the past ten years, five new monasteries have been under construction in that country, and the Nuns have been most appreciative of your help and encouragement.

Thirdly, I will visit the communities of many Carmelite teaching Sisters who work among the poor in parish education centers and in the schools. These Sisters, even before they can take care of the spiritual and educational needs of the children, must often respond to their physical and material needs for food, clothing and medicine. The Sisters, and the children and their families too, are grateful for your help.

Through your constant support of Carmelite Missions, you make my visits to our young men and women in formation programs, to our contemplative Nuns, and to our teaching Sisters in the Philippines so very meaningful. Your generosity will again make their Christmas special this year. May God reward you for your goodness and give you a peace-filled and happy Christmas.

Love and peace,

*Fr. John Malley, O.Carm.*

Father John Malley, O.Carm.  
Director of Carmelite Missions

**REMEMBER THE CARMELITE MISSIONS WHEN YOU WRITE YOUR WILL**

# SAINT OF THE MONTH

## SAINT STEPHEN, THE PROTOMARTYR

FEAST DAY – DECEMBER 26

The growth of the Church after Pentecost was gradual. The apostles did not go into Jerusalem, find a place that was suitable, and set up the first Christian church. Rather, they continued their attendance at the synagogue, kept the dietetic laws of the Jewish faith, and observed faithfully the rite of circumcision.

The special meetings, celebrating the liturgy that we now call the Mass, developed from meals that were shared together in a home, suppers that terminated with the Eucharist. Finally, the apostles realized that the Mosaic laws of diet were no longer necessary nor, they agreed, was circumcision. But it took a vision to Peter and much discussion to arrive at that point. Many of the early churches were ordinary homes. Only gradually did they set up a separate place of worship.

The Acts of the Apostles describe the life of the early Christians: "They devoted themselves to the teachings of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers....All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's needs" (Acts 2, 42).



*New Contemplative Community, Tanay, Philippines*

### Background of Stephen

To understand the life of St. Stephen, the first martyr, we must remember that Jerusalem at that time was a cosmopolitan city with Jews and Gentiles from all over the world. Many of the visiting Jews, and others who came from the outside to settle in Jerusalem, did not speak Hebrew (actually Aramaic) as it was spoken in the city.

In the United States and Canada, we have ethnic colonies in large cities where the native language of the country of origin is spoken. It was like this in Jerusalem, only there were not as many different languages. The most popular language spoken in the known world of those days (and in Rome, too) was Greek. To accommodate those who spoke no Hebrew, synagogues were set up and the sermons were in Greek. These groups were called Hellenists, distinguishing them from the Hebrews.

The country of Stephen's birth is not known. He may have migrated to Jerusalem, but most historians think that he was born there of a family who spoke Greek. We know nothing of his parents or his childhood. It is a very logical conclusion that he was a pious Jew who accepted wholeheartedly the teaching of Jesus. He was active in his synagogue and sought to have his people accept the teachings of Christ. The Acts of the Apostles says of him: "He was a man filled with faith and the Holy Spirit."

### Call to be a Deacon

As the Church grew, a problem arose. The Hellenists complained that their widows, orphans and poor were discriminated against and were not given their fair share of help. The Church was getting larger, and the apostles had their hands full. This complaint precipitated a decision to select assistants to "wait on tables." Seven good men were selected, Stephen among them. A ceremony was conducted during which the apostles laid hands on them. In this way they were ordained deacons. Their charge was to assist the apostles, primarily with the material concerns of the Church.

Now that he was a deacon, Stephen increased his zeal in the synagogue to convert his fellow "Hellenists." This caused trouble. The elders decided to have a debate during which Stephen was able to defend his position. But his adversaries were no match for Stephen. He confounded them "with the wisdom and spirit with which he spoke." Angry and humiliated, they persuaded some men to testify against Stephen. They stated that they had heard "blasphemy" from him. In this way they incited the people, the elders and the scribes.

### Trial of Stephen

Stephen was seized and taken before the Sanhedrin where he was accused: "This man never stops making statements against the holy place (temple) and the law." Though the Sanhedrin stared at him intently while the accusations were made, Stephen's face seemed like that



*Carmelite Sisters of Our Lady in Dumaguete City, Philippines (Teachers)*



*Carmelite Nuns of the Holy Trinity, Laguna, Philippines*

of an angel. He was unruffled by the accusations: "We have heard him claim that Jesus, the Nazarene, will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses handed down to us."

The high priest asked Stephen if this was true. Stephen replied in a long speech, tracing the interrelation of God with Israel from Abraham, Moses and the Prophets down to Solomon who built the temple, but he argued that throughout history the divine presence was not confined to one spot or one country. He continued, saying it was strange that descendants of those who persecuted the Prophets, repudiated Moses and abandoned the true worship of God for idolatry should charge him with blasphemy.

His hearers were angry but Stephen was content and peaceful for having made this public profession of faith. We read in the Acts of the Apostles: "Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked to the sky above and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at God's right hand." Stephen exclaimed: "Look, I see an opening in the sky, and the Son of Man standing at God's right hand."

### His Death

The Sanhedrin and the onlookers were furious. They "ground their teeth," shouted aloud, and held their hands over their ears. Stephen was condemned according to the law found in the Book of Leviticus, chapter 24. It reads that anyone blaspheming God should be stoned to death. Though the account in Acts

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*Carmel's Children Choir, Roxas*

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seems to describe a mob scene, actually it was not a lynching but an excited mob, following what they thought was God's law.

First, everyone put their hands on Stephen's head. Then, they dragged him out of the city to a high place. To "work" more easily, they took off their outer garments. A bystander, a youth named Saul (later known as St. Paul), took care of their garments. They bound Stephen's hands and dropped him off an elevation. Then, the stoning proceeded.

With stones raining on him, Stephen was heard to say: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord do not hold this sin against them." The account in the Acts of the Apostles ends simply: "And with that he died."

### Feast of Stephen and Role of the Deacon

For centuries August 3 had been a special day for St. Stephen, for it was the feast of the finding of his relics. Later his feast was firmly established on December 26, immediately after Christmas, because he was the first follower of Jesus to lay down his life for his Lord. He was given the Greek title, "Protomartyr," meaning the first martyr.



*Carmelite Missionary Sisters of St. Therese, Manila (Teachers)*

For many centuries during the Middle Ages, the role of the deacon in the Church had become a minor one, and a permanent deacon was rare. St. Francis of Assisi was one of the exceptions, choosing to be ordained a deacon and not a priest out of humility. After the Second Vatican Council, however, the presence and role of a deacon have once more assumed their rightful place among the clergy. Now many parishes throughout the world can boast of one or two deacons, and they in turn can boast of one of the first seven deacons in Christian history, the glorious martyr, St. Stephen.



*Contemplative Monastery being built in Pangasinan, Philippines*