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23 MONDAYMonday, 3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Easter

Acts 6: 8 - 15

Ps 118: 23-24, 26-27, 29-30

John 6: 22 - 29

Quickly after Jesus' resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit, His followers began telling His story to all who'd listen. They gave witness to His saving passion, death and rising and preached His 'good news'. But soon they began to find a new meaning for the word "witness": giving your life for your faith in Him and His saving Pasch. Hardly had the young Christian community begun to expand than hatred and opposition to it also began. As Jesus himself was hounded and persecuted, then killed, His followers (as He'd foretold) suffered the same fate. And so it's continued right up to present times. Even the lies and trickery used today to discredit Jesus' followers are much the same as they've always been, used against Jesus himself and some of the first Christians, like St Stephen for instance. In the story of Stephen's martyrdom there are pre-echoes of many details of recent martyrdoms, as well as those of men and women centuries ago, who've been persecuted and killed because, like Stephen, they were people "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit". Such people seem to attract opposition. But haven't we all, at some time, felt irritated or annoyed at someone whose simple wisdom and goodness seems to accuse our own compromises, or lack of zeal or sincerity? That Stephen's face appeared to his judges "like the face of an angel" seemed like a provocation. Haven't we too allowed appearances to trigger hostility, dislike or worse? Stephen's story invites a prayerful self-reflection ..... and a wonder at the church's wisdom in placing side by side in celebration Christmas Day and St Stephen's Day.

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