



# FROM FR. RASO

In history and in literature, we encounter many heroes that genuinely inspire us: Davy Crockett at the Alamo and Audie Murphy in World War II are good examples of this in history; Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Sidney Carton in *A Tale of Two Cities* are two stirring examples from literature. However, the example that we have in our First Reading today takes second place to none of them. The courage shown by Saint Peter when he insisted upon being crucified upside-down on Vatican Hill at the beginning of the Church's history and in more recent times, the sheer goodness of Saint Maximilian Kolbe in taking the place of a family man and dying in his place in the concentration camp can't do anything other than shine a beautiful light on their valor and their understanding of what Jesus needed them to do when the need arose, but that image we have today of Saint Stephen, the first of many to die for Christ, also and forever shines forth through the centuries as the sacrifice of someone who not only understood what Christ might require of him but even more of the example one person can make in following Jesus up the hill to Calvary and, on one hand, creating a nightmare for the enemies of Christ and on the other hand, creating a memory for the followers of Christ that can never be erased or forgotten.

First of all, Saint Stephen simply would not be silenced, even if that silence could have saved him from an unusually frightening death. He was no fool nor was he insane; He didn't want to die for Christ. That would simply have gone against human nature. However, it was that what it took, Stephen was the first in a long line of Christian heroes who would make that choice.

However, that wasn't all he did, as we hear today, He also gave one last, powerful sermon, in word as well as deed. As the enemies of Christ lead him out to death, he says "Behold! I see the Heavens opened and the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God! - a place He had been occupying since the Ascension - and then, as the stones began to rain down upon him, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" If this last statement reminds us of Jesus on the Cross saying "Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing", it is no mistake: Stephen was courageous and he was saintly but I suspect he was also clever. Those words would haunt everyone present on that day, including that young man named Saul, whose name soon would be changed to Paul. Saints like Stephen have good instincts. Saints like Paul have good memories.

And potential saints like you and I should have good memories too. There are three types of heroes that we remember today: Those like Davy Crockett we remember with admiration; those like Sidney Carton we remember with wonder. However, those like Saint Stephen we should remember with determination. It is unlikely that we will ever face being stoned to death, but it is even more unlikely that we will not be faced with defending our faith and defending our Church. One example; Have you ever tried to defend the Right to Life before people who are red-in-the-face in protesting the right to abortion? If so, you don't know what it is like to be stoned to death but you have known the anger of those who surrounded Stephen on that sad day. It takes courage to face such anger down but we will be expected by Our Lord to do so. When such a day comes to us, may Saint Stephen stand at our side. We won't be meeting him face-to-face on that day, but if we imitate his faith and courage on that day we will surely meet him on a wonderful day to come.