

St. Steven, whom we hear about in today's first reading, was one of the first 7 deacons of the Church and its first martyr. It is interesting to note that Stephen, though chosen by the Apostles and ordained to the ministry of service, was stoned not for his works of charity, but for his preaching!

As a precaution, I took the liberty of hiding all the stones I could find laying around today.

Before He began his homily, Scripture tells us that when the Sanhedrin looked at Steven, he had the face of an angel. He preached to the Sanhedrin the long and often defiant history of the Jewish people. He really laid it out there and he called them to task for not living their scriptural heritage. But, while this certainly angered them, it was his vision of Jesus, the Son of Man, standing in heaven at God's right hand that was more than they could bear to hear.

He saw Jesus. And it cost him his earthly life.

In today's Gospel, we see Our Lord as a prayerful, concerned friend, worried about us, His followers, on the eve of His death.

In our second reading, John has a vision of Jesus, who is King, the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last.

Most of our ideas about what Jesus looks like are from the Scriptures, even if indirectly. Artists and poets and song writers have drawn their inspiration from these sacred pages for over two thousand years. The babe in the manger, the child in the temple, the joyful man at a wedding, the zealous one driving the moneychangers out of the temple, the Good and kind shepherd, the one who calms the raging seas, yet weeps at his friend's

tomb. The crucified, the risen, the glorious, He who is both the bridegroom and the lamb. All of these images of Christ come from our Scriptures.

But the most powerful image of Jesus is our own understanding of who He is because it shapes us and how we respond to those around us.

It is what gave Stephen the face of an angel and made him able to pray for the forgiveness of those who were killing him. Clearly, Stephen knew Scripture, but by his countenance, we see his knowledge was ratified by his relationship with the ascended Jesus.

It has been said that when other's see us, they see Christ. But what they actually see is our understanding of Christ AND our relationship with Him.

Is Jesus brother to us? We might more fraternal. Is He King and Judge? Then we might be more concerned about lost souls. Is He naked, or sick or in prison? Then we are more charitable.

The importance of how we perceive Our Lord is no small issue. Our relationship, our vision of who He is forms our conscience. It carves out our world view. It helps to make us more fully human. It molds our whole person, body and soul.

The Good News is that there is no right or wrong answer here. It is what it is. How we look at the face of Jesus is truly personal. The other Good News here is that our vision is not static, or at least it is not supposed to be. It changes as our relationship with Him changes. Jesus does not change, but He reveals more of Himself to us, and so we change as our maturity or our regression

in faith occurs. In other words, the Jesus of our childhood should look different in the eyes of our heart and mind from the Jesus of our twilight years, right?

In light of all that I have said, I leave you with two questions. At first they may seem pretty simple, but if you take the questions to heart, you may find them to be harder than you might first think:

Here is the first: If you had to send someone to pick Jesus up at the airport, how would you describe Him so that the driver, who has never seen Him, will know Him without a doubt?

And the second question is this: What does my description say about my understanding of who Jesus is?

Take these questions with you this seventh and final week of Easter to help prepare you for the Feast that is Pentecost.