

## Seeds

<sup>15</sup> but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, <sup>16</sup> but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame.

### **1 Peter 3:15-16**

<sup>1</sup> I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingly power: <sup>2</sup> proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching. <sup>3</sup> For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine but, following their own desires and insatiable curiosity, will accumulate teachers <sup>4</sup> and will stop listening to the truth and will be diverted to myths. <sup>5</sup> But you, be self-possessed in all circumstances; put up with hardship; perform the work of an evangelist; fulfill your ministry.

### **2 Timothy, 4:1-5**

In **Luke 14:26**, Jesus said

<sup>26</sup> "If any one comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

**Matthew 10:37** says it a bit softer, <sup>37</sup> "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;

The point being, that to be real disciples of Christ we must put him first among everyone else. After all, he put us first, even above his own life. Are we ready to return the favor?

Which brings me in mind of a sign Joe used to have hanging in his office, “You love Jesus only as much as the person you like the least.”

In the story of the Prodigal son, the lost son finds himself lower than the pigs he has been hired to feed and he finally sheds his arrogance, returns home and tells his father, “Dad, I screwed up royally and I know it. I don’t expect you to forgive me but could I be a lowly servant and just work for my food and a place to sleep?” He completely humbles himself, abandons his selfishness and begs only for food and board.

This is his confession of sin, his contrite admission of his wrong doing and his promise never to act this way again.

And of course his father forgives him and welcomes him back into the family with fine clothes, a ring in his finger and a huge feast of joy.

This is God, welcoming the sinner back into the kingdom.

This is us at reconciliation, dying to self, admitting our wrong doing and giving ourselves up to Christ and the Father.

### **Q. What is a Martyr?**

The Apostles believed so strongly in Jesus that most of them died in defense of Him.

There are still Christians today who are willing to die, rather than betray Christ. Christians are being persecuted every day, simply for their beliefs.

We see it here in this country by this “Never offend anyone” idea that is going around. But it’s going around at the expense of our beliefs and

when we stand up for what we believe in, we are called closed minded and bigots and made to feel wrong and dirty.

Overseas, Christians are being executed, simply because they refuse to betray Christ. Are we ready to take that ultimate stand?

**Q. Who was St. Stephen?**

*A. The first Martyr of the Church*

**Q. Why was he Martyred?**

*A. For holding fast to his belief in Jesus Christ, even to the point of death.*

**Q. What holy act did he perform at the moment of his death?**

*A. Like Christ on the cross, he asked God to forgive those who were killing him.*

**Stephen's trial**

**Accusation against Stephen.**

<sup>8</sup> Now Stephen, filled with grace and power, was working great wonders and signs among the people. <sup>9</sup> Certain members of the so-called Synagogue of Freedmen, Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and people from Cilicia and Asia, came forward and debated with Stephen, <sup>10</sup> but they could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke. <sup>11</sup> Then they instigated some men to say, "We have heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God." <sup>12</sup> They stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes, accosted him, seized him, and brought him before the Sanhedrin. <sup>13</sup> They presented false witnesses who testified, "This man never stops saying things against [this] holy place and the law. <sup>14</sup> For we have heard him claim that this Jesus the Nazorean will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us." <sup>15</sup> All those who sat in the Sanhedrin

looked intently at him and saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

### **Acts 6:8-15**

#### **Stephen's Discourses.**

<sup>1</sup> Then the high priest asked, "Is this so?" <sup>2</sup> And he replied, "My brothers and fathers, listen. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia, before he had settled in Haran...

Then he goes on to review the entire Old Testament up until Jacob and the building of the Temple and concludes with his own indictment of the Sanhedron...

#### **Conclusion.**

<sup>51</sup> "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always oppose the holy Spirit; you are just like your ancestors. <sup>52</sup> Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They put to death those who foretold the coming of the righteous one, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become. <sup>53</sup> You received the law as transmitted by angels, but you did not observe it."

#### **Stephen's Martyrdom.**

<sup>54</sup> When they heard this, they were infuriated, and they ground their teeth at him. <sup>55</sup> But he, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked up intently to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, <sup>56</sup> and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." <sup>57</sup> But they cried out in a loud voice, covered their ears, and rushed upon him together. <sup>58</sup> They threw him out of the city, and began to stone him. The witnesses laid down their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul. <sup>59</sup> As they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." <sup>60</sup> Then he fell to his knees and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them"; and when he said this, he fell asleep.

### **Acts 7:1-2 – 51-60**

**Q. Are you ready to defend your faith that far?**

**Q. Are you ready to give up your social life for Christ?**

**Q. Are you at least ready to not be afraid to talk about your faith to family, friends, even strangers?**

You heard Donna ask if you are willing to simply invite someone to go to church with you. That's a simple first step.

When you see a good movie, you tell your friends and you tell them they HAVE to go see it. Or find a new restaurant, and you go again with friends. You get a new toy, like a great new phone, or tablet, or video game and you can't wait to share it with your friends.

You know from my witness earlier that I am a convert to Catholicism. I'm a convert because I'm the truth guy. I always want to know the truth. When I see a social media post that claims all I have to do is like this or retweet this or share it with ten people and Bill Gates will donate \$100 to the lost kitten foundation, I will dig into the facts and post the truth.

I came to Catholicism because the more I looked into the facts, the more truth I found. For every question I had about Catholicism, there was a logical reasonable answer and when I finally took the plunge and was confirmed at Easter Vigil in 2010, I felt like a kid at Christmas. I had a new toy. A new Joy in Christ that I had never experienced before and I wanted to share it with everybody.

I've been sharing it with you guys ever since, even before I was confirmed I sang at the teen mass and worked with Life Teen.

So how can you bring up your faith to strangers without looking like some kind of weirdo?

Last month I flew to Carson City Nevada to visit with my oldest son and his wife, and most importantly my grandchildren... (show picture?)

While I traveled, I wore this Tee Shirt.

At the airport checking in, the attendant said "I like your shirt! We need more of that these days. What church do you go to?"

At the security check the TSA agent said "Nice shirt"

In Chicago, while I was waiting for my connecting flight to Reno, a young college music student came and sat next to me. She struck up a conversation because of my guitar, she showed me her two clarinets, then mentioned my shirt and told me she was in the music ministry at her church. I told her about St. Mary Magdalene Catholic Church and she asked several questions about Catholics and contemporary music. She was amazed that we didn't sing only Gregorian chants in Latin but was sincerely interested in hearing my answers to her questions.

In Carson City I was wearing my 2015 DYC shirt. It's not as blatantly Christian as this one, you have to read it carefully to know that it has a Christian theme. I took my grandson to the Nevada State Train Museum and the guy taking tickets, all dressed up like an old time conductor with a little pill box hat and a pocket watch said "What does SCDYC stand for?"

I told him, "South Carolina Diocesan Youth Conference."

He said "What's that?"

And I said “It’s about eight hundred Catholic teenagers from all over South Carolina gathering for a retreat weekend of Praise and worship and study of Jesus Christ.”

He said “Catholics do praise and worship?”

I said, “Well, yeah, actually every day.”

While my Grandson played with the Brio trains, we spent about fifteen minutes talking about Jesus and answering questions about Catholicism. I gave him one of my scripture cards and he thanked me and shook my hand then shoed us out to the work shed where they restore old trains, normally off limits to museum visitors.

By being polite and respectful to him, Tyler and I got to see some things most people don’t see and just maybe I planted a tiny seed in his mind about Catholicism.

This session is about seeds. I’ve been teaching apologetics to the Men’s Bible Study at Church, I’m happy to speak to anyone about my faith, I’ve engaged in conversations on Facebook and over e-mail about my beliefs and the teachings of the Church but In all that time, nobody has yet said to me, “I believe you, You’ve convinced me and I am going to join the Church.

But that’s OK with me. Because you see, only the Holy Spirit can change someone’s heart. Only the Holy Spirit can make converts. Only the Holy Spirit can reap the harvest, our job is simply to plant the seeds.

Are you ready?