

Reflections for the 7th Sunday of Easter

Acts 7.55-60;

Psalm 97 (96).1-2, 6-7, 9

Revelation 22.12-14, 16-17, 20

John 17.20-26

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PAX



CHRISTI

International Catholic Movement for Peace



To be won over by Christ's Gospel of peace

'The witnesses put down their clothes at the feet of a young man called Saul.' Thus, with a little stroke of the pen, Luke sets up the whole of what is to follow in the life of St. Paul (the major theme of the second half of the Acts of the Apostles).

It's a shame the lectionary misses out the next chilling verse - *'Saul approved of the killing'* - because that line completes the sketch of the character of the unconverted Saul: so sure God was on his side, that he was doing God's work and that violence in pursuit of his cause was justified ... Stoning to death is fortunately not part of our experience. However, has Saul's mind-set really gone away? Governments regularly assert their right to destroy people and property in the name of peace. The weapons change (guns and bombs replacing rocks). But 'Saul' - meaning mainstream culture, popular media and, perhaps, ourselves, too, as individuals - still *'approves of the killing'* (rather than mourning each death).

Questions of war and peace are always complex, but it's at least time to register the disconnect between complacent acceptance of the 'inevitability' of violence and this Sunday's Scriptures.

Like Jesus, Stephen dies actively praying for his persecutors. At the end of the Book of Revelation the invitation to feed on the tree of life and enter the Holy City is extended to those who have *'washed their robes white'* (in the blood of the Lamb) - i.e. the victims of violence, rather than its perpetrators. And, finally, on the night before he dies the Lord prays for such a unity among his followers *'that the world may believe'*.

May we so live that even 'Saul' (the unconverted parts of our culture and, indeed, of ourselves) may be won over to Christ's Gospel of peace.