

**Homily for the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter**  
**St. Francis of Assisi Parish – Belchertown, Massachusetts**  
**June 2, 2019**



Scripture Readings: Acts 7:55-60 ✘ Psalm 97:1-2, 6-7, 9 ✘ Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20 ✘ John 17:20-26

**S**ome years ago, there was a magazine article by Julian Motheral entitled, “Letter to a Stranger.” It was addressed to “Someone out There.” The “someone-out-there” was a young robber who knocked Julian down during a service station holdup. The robber then shot him as he lay on the ground. The bullet entered Julian’s spine and left him paralyzed.

Julian began his letter to the robber by saying that he could never forget that terrible night when all this happened. He wrote:

“Until that night, I could walk on moonlit nights with my wife. Until that night, I could run and play with my young son. I have not been able to do any of these things now for almost ten years — ever since you put a bullet in my spine.”

Julian went on to describe the mental and physical agony that he suffered. At times, it got so bad that he just didn’t want to live. As the painful days stretched into weeks and months, Julian began reflecting on the Gospels, especially the parts about Jesus’ suffering and death. As he did, grace began to operate in his life and he experienced a remarkable transformation of mind and heart.

He concluded his letter to the robber saying, “I do not know your name, and may never know it... Do I forgive you? By myself I couldn’t do it... But when I remembered Jesus on the Cross, I found I could pray... ‘Father, forgive the boy who shot me, for he didn’t realize what he was doing.’”

The story of Julian Motheral and the story of Stephen in our first reading today are very similar to one another. Like Stephen, Julian was knocked to the ground and his life, as he knew it, was taken from him in a violent way. And, like Stephen, Julian didn’t brood and allow his heart to be filled with contempt and hatred. He, too, forgave his attacker.

These stories are very fitting stories for us to contemplate on this Sunday after the feast of the Ascension, which we celebrated this past Thursday. These stories show Stephen and Julian carrying out the command that Jesus gave to his followers just before he Ascended into heaven: “Make disciples of all nations... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

Stephen and Julian did just that and they did it in the most powerful way that one person can teach another. They did it by example. Someone once said that people are moved more by sermons they can see than by sermons they can hear. And that’s the kind of sermon Stephen preached in today’s first reading. It’s also the kind of sermon that Julian preached by accepting the conditions of his life and forgiving his assailant. Both Stephen and Julian preached sermons people can see; they both preached the Good News of Jesus by example.

What they did, each one of us is called to do as well. We are called to speak the Word of God with our mouths but the way we live our lives is just as important, if not more important. For most of us, there will be no moments as trying as the situations that Stephen and Julian experienced but there will be moments when we are confronted with a choice and our response could be a time when we can preach loudly and clearly the Gospel of Christ.

The Cross has been described as a “Sign of Contradiction”. To pick up that Cross and be a visible sign of God’s love for the world more, often than not, require that we contradict what society, even a well-intentioned society, says that we should do. It often means contradicting our emotions and natural responses as well.

As we seek to follow the will of God in our lives, as we seek to answer God’s call to preach the Gospel to all people. Let us pray for the strength and courage to live lives in accord with the will of God every days of our lives, and most especially, in those moments when we are confronted with strong emotions and tough choices. ✘