

Homily – Fifth Sunday of Easter

By Fr. Carlos Rendon

“To know the Almighty God is to know everlasting life”. Today, through the Scriptures, the Lord invites us not only to know Him, but to follow Him, to become like Him, and to walk the path that leads to eternal life.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells us clearly: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6) Jesus is not simply showing us a path—He is the path. And to walk this path means to live as He lived, to love as He loved, to forgive as He forgave, and to give ourselves as He gave Himself.

Today, the Church places before us one of the most powerful witnesses of this truth: Saint Stephen, the first martyr.

The Acts of the Apostles tells us: “But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God... ‘Look,’ he said, ‘I see the heavens opened...’” (Acts 7:55-56)

And while they were killing him, he prayed: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit... Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” (Acts 7:59-60)

Stephen did exactly what Jesus did on the cross. He forgave. And it is precisely at that moment—at the moment of radical love, radical forgiveness—that the heavens were opened to him.

Brothers and sisters, this is the key: The path to heaven is not only believing in Christ—it is becoming like Christ.

Why is the Church so rich in martyrs? Because they fell in love with Jesus. They fell in love with His life, His mission, and His way of loving.

And the early Church grew not by power, not by influence, but because the world saw something different. As many said of the first Christians: “See how they love one another.” Even their enemies saw it.

Saint Augustine once reflected that the Church owes a great debt to Saint Stephen, because among those present at his martyrdom was Saul, who later became Saint Paul. The prayer of Stephen, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them,” became a seed that God later transformed into the conversion of Paul.

Forgiveness changes history. William Barclay once said that those who follow Christ will always find the strength to do what is humanly impossible. And forgiveness is exactly humanly impossible. But with Christ, it becomes possible.

We see this even in our own time. In the United States, after the tragic shooting at Emanuel AME Church

in Charleston, family members of the victims stood in court and publicly forgave the man who killed their loved ones. They said, "We forgive you." This shocked the world.

In another case, after the Amish school shooting in Pennsylvania, the Amish community not only forgave the attacker but also supported his family.

These are not weak acts. These are acts of supernatural strength. These are people walking the way of Christ. And what about us? Maybe we are not called to martyrdom, but we are all called to forgiveness.

In our daily lives:

- When someone hurts us in our family
- When there is division in our community
- When we feel misunderstood or rejected
- When we carry wounds that are still open

The Lord says to us today: forgive. Not because it is easy. But because it is the way.

And when we forgive, something happens: heaven begins to open—not only at the end of our lives, but even now.

The Psalm today reminds us: "Into your hands I commend my spirit." (Psalm 31:5) This is trust. This is surrender. And Saint Peter reminds us who we are in 1st Peter 2:9. He said: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people." We are not just individuals trying to survive. We are a people called to reflect Christ.

And what does Christ look like? A man on the cross who says, "Father, forgive them."

If Jesus is the way, then forgiveness is part of that way. And if heaven has many dwelling places, as Jesus promised in John 14:2. He said: "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places... I go to prepare a place for you." Then the road to those dwelling places is marked by love, sacrifice, and forgiveness.

Today, the Lord invites us:

- To trust Him
- To follow Him
- And to become like Him

And maybe the question we take home today is simple: Who do I need to forgive? Because that may be the very place where heaven begins to open in your life. Amen.