After a bold and courageous witness to the faith, Stephen is attacked by his enemies. Rather than curse them, his lips turn to prayer. Despite being viciously rejected by worldly powers, Stephen has a profound trust and surrenders himself into the hands of God.\(^1\) This is no mere coincidence. Stephen is praying Psalm 31. Stephen is praying the same words that Jesus does in the Gospel of Luke. “Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit” and then Jesus breathes his last (Luke 23:46).

Discipleship often calls for heroic virtue. “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?” (Mark 8:35-36)

At the end of our passage from the Acts of the Apostles, we learn that there is a young man present named Saul. He will appear later in the Acts as a great persecutor of Christians. The blood of martyrs often sews the seeds for conversion and growth in the church. Saint Stephen, martyred on earth, may have been a great champion in heaven to help bring about the conversion of Saul. While we mourn the death of Stephen, we are also amazed how God can transform Stephen’s suffering to bring about good in the church. Saul in time will become Paul the great Apostle to the Gentiles.

Under great oppression, the saints often have a calmness about them in the most difficult of circumstances. They have united their suffering to Christ’s on the cross and Jesus is with them in the midst of their hour of trial. Stephen looks with a loving gaze to heaven, and his eyes pierce the clouds. “Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56).

This is not uncommon in the lives of others saints. Charles de Foucauld is the Spiritual Godfather of the Little Sisters of Jesus who served in the Fairbanks Diocese for 6 decades with many joyful years in Nome and Little Diomede. Jesus was led into the desert by the Holy Spirit for 40 days at the start of his ministry. So to with Brother Charles. The Holy Spirit led him to practice great austerity as a hermit in the Saharan Desert amidst the Muslims of Algiers.\(^ii\) Those who were not Christian, recognized him as a holy man. In his earlier life, he had been a soldier and he remained friends with everyone including soldiers. But just as Stephen was misunderstood and martyred, so to with Charles de Foucauld. Suspected of being a spy, he was killed by hostile forces.

We remember Brother Charles for his famous prayer of abandonment. He had the same trust as the writer of Psalm 31. “Father, I abandon myself into your hands; Do with me what you will. Whatever you may do, I thank you: I am ready for all, I accept all.” The prayer continues, “Into your hands I commend my soul: I offer it to you with all the love of my heart, for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself, to surrender myself into your hands without reserve…”

Everyone is called to be a saint, and if one has the privilege of being with an elder at the moment of death, one may notice that same spiritual trust and abandonment. My grandmother was in her 90’s when the infirmities of old age overtook her body. Hospice recommended heavy medication to keep her from suffering any pain. In her last moments, she had an angelic gaze, her eyes looked upward like Saint Stephen. She was so heavily medicated that she should have been asleep. But the change in her appearance was quite dramatic. It is as if the heavens opened up and the Son of Man was standing at the right hand of God beckoning her to let go of life on earth and accept an inheritance in heaven. . . Alas, only she and God exchanged words. From her appearance, she may have echoed the trust and abandonment of Psalm 31:

> Into your hands I commend my spirit;  
> you will redeem me, O LORD, O faithful God.  
> My trust is in the LORD;  
> I will rejoice and be glad of your mercy (Ps 31:6, 7b, 8a).

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\(^1\) Praying the Psalms in Christ, Kriegshauser p. 88.
ii saintsresource.com/charles-de-foucauld