Q1. (Faith) The prophet Isaiah tells us that no matter how bad our sins are, if we truly repent, Our Lord will forgive our sins. Saul, who would later become St. Paul, was a virulent persecutor of the nascent Church, yet, God forgave him and St. Paul became an Apostle, after the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus and one of the Church’s greatest saints. What does this tell you about God’s desire to forgive your sins and the mechanism He established in the Church to accomplish that forgiveness?

Acts 8:1,3

1 Now Saul was consenting to his execution.

3 Saul, meanwhile, was trying to destroy the church; entering house after house and dragging out men and women, he handed them over for imprisonment.

Isaiah1:18

Come now, let us set things right, says the LORD: Though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow; Though they be crimson red, they may become white as wool.

Q2. (Hope) St Stephen makes an amazing statement before his martyrdom when he spoke of Jesus standing by the throne of God. Since we usually hear of Jesus sitting at the right hand of God what is the significance of Jesus standing and what hope does that give to us?

“Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” V.56

Q3. (Love) How are St. Stephen’s words and actions at the time of his martyrdom an example to us of how to fulfill the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount about treatment of our enemies?

Matthew 5:10-12

10 Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me.

12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:43-44

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.

A1. (Faith) The prophet Isaiah tells us that no matter how bad our sins are, if we truly repent, Our Lord will forgive our sins. Saul, who would later become St. Paul, was a virulent persecutor of the nascent Church, yet, God forgave him and St. Paul became an Apostle, after the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus and one of the Church’s greatest saints. What does this tell you about God’s desire to forgive your sins and the mechanism He established in the Church to accomplish that forgiveness?

**Acts 8:1,3**

**1 Now Saul was consenting to his execution.**

**3 Saul, meanwhile, was trying to destroy the church; entering house after house and dragging out men and women, he handed them over for imprisonment.**

**Isaiah1:18**

**Come now, let us set things right, says the LORD: Though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow; Though they be crimson red, they may become white as wool.**

It is God’s desire that everyone come to believe in Jesus and to be saved. He has given us the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a simple, easily accessible, and effective means of receiving and knowing we have received forgiveness of our sins no matter how heinous. If God could forgive St Paul, and not only forgive but adopt him as a principal messenger of His Word, God can also forgive my sins if I avail myself of the Grace He has offered.

**CCC74 God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth": that is, of Christ Jesus.**

A2. (Hope) St Stephen makes an amazing statement before his martyrdom when he spoke of Jesus standing by the throne of God. Since we usually hear of Jesus sitting at the right hand of God what is the significance of Jesus standing and what hope does that give to us?

**“Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” V.56**

Jesus is normally spoken of seated at the right hand of God signifying His equality with God in power and authority.

**2 Kings 2:19**

**Then Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him for Adonijah, and the king stood up to meet her and paid her homage.**

King Solomon stood when his mother entered the court. It was a gesture of highest respect to the one entering the court. So it is with Jesus who stands when a faithful martyr enters the courts of heaven.

Our hope is that if we remain faithful to the end, we will be greeted by Our Lord, perhaps not standing, but acknowledging our steadfast faith.

A3. (Love) How are St. Stephen’s words and actions at the time of his martyrdom an example to us of how to fulfill the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount about treatment of our enemies?

**Matthew 5:10-12**

**10 Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**11 Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me.**

**12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

**Matthew 5:43-44**

**“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.**

Following the example of St. Stephen, when faced with hardship and persecution for the faith, I should rejoice at being worthy to suffer with Christ and I should pray for them as Jesus and St. Stephen prayed for those who executed them.