

Yesterday, we saw God come among us as a ‘helpless’ child – God in the fullness of humanity, one like us in all things but sin. One like us, then, but not ‘helpless’ before sin which makes our ‘helplessness’ total and may explain not only our capacity to be deceived but our very willingness to be deceived. I’m thinking here of the lies told by such as Trump and Johnson and our willingness to hear them and even excuse them as ‘necessary’ lies – the sort of discourse now expected from our leaders if they are to retain their position at the top and defeat any possible rivals. This propensity to untruth is, of course, not new and, in today’s gospel passage, the disciples of Jesus are warned what is in store for them when they resist it, when they speak truth to untruth, to those who lie in order to retain power. But it also highlights the graced nature of this ability to speak truth to power; we have to hew closely to Christ if we ourselves are not to be deceived; to follow the myriad of opinions which now pass for news. This, in itself, is a form of suffering: a willingness to embrace uncertainty with regard to one’s own opinions and wait instead for the Lord to provide one’s truth. It’s a sort of helplessness. It’s who we really are before God. And the necessary words will come, as Stephen demonstrates: not the words we might have chosen to evade death, as so many of our words are, but the words that only life after death can verify.

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