

church: those who willingly give up their lives for Christ's sake, as St. Stephen did; those who, like St. John, are willing to suffer, but are not called upon to die for Him; and those who, like the Innocents, suffered, but had no wills to offer to God; martyrs both in will and in deed; martyrs in will, but not in deed; and martyrs in deed, but not in will.

The circumstances of St. Stephen's death are given with much fulness in the seventh chapter of the Acts, and we see his eloquence, his dauntless courage, and his close following of his Master in the prayer for his enemies. It has been beautifully suggested that the custom of remembering the days on which holy men died for their Lord must have begun with the remembrance of the death of the first martyr. How natural for those who saw him die, and especially for one—the great apostle—at whose feet the witnesses "laid down their clothes," he who was consenting unto his death, to say, as year by year the day came round, "This was the day on which Stephen fell asleep."

We know more of the life of St. John, whose day has been kept from very early times—on the 27th of December—than of the other evangelists. He was the son of Zebedee and brother of St. James the Great. He and St. Andrew were the first two disciples who were called by our Lord. He was the constant companion of his Master, and one of the three who witnessed the transfiguration and were present in the garden of Gethsemane. He stood by the cross and received from Christ the care of His mother. He was honoured by the distinction of "the disciple whom Jesus loved." He was the latest living apostle, dying a natural death at Ephesus at the age of one hundred. During the persecution of Domitian he was summoned to Rome, and is said to have been cast into a caldron of boiling oil, but to have escaped unhurt. After this he was banished to the Isle of Patmos, and it is thought that the book of the Revelation was written during this banishment. On the Emperor's death, A. D. 96, he was allowed to return to Ephesus, where, as is generally agreed, he wrote the fourth gospel and his three epistles. There was a tradition that St. John should not die, founded upon our Lord's words, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" But the Evangelist guards against this interpretation in his gospel, chapter xxi, 23. St. John is sometimes represented in art holding a cup, from which a serpent is escaping. This is in reference to the legend which says, that either at

Rome or at Ephesus, a cup of poisoned wine was given him, but the poison came forth in the form of a serpent; St. John drank the wine unhurt, and the poisoner fell dead at his feet. The symbol of St. John is the eagle, indicating, by the keenness of its vision and the strength of its flight, the insight of the apostle, and his power of apprehending the highest and holiest truths.

The story of the slaughter of the children of Bethlehem by Herod the Great is told in secular history as well as by St. Matthew. Their number has been variously stated by different writers, but modern authorities say that it was probably not above twenty. These little children, who died for the holy child Jesus, have always been held in very tender memory; with the story of their death is associated not only the words of the prophet telling of the sad mourning of a mother for her children (Jeremiah xxxi, 15), but also the triumphant vision of St. John in the fourteenth chapter of the Revelation, "These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God, and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile; for they are without fault before the throne of God." An ancient writer, himself a martyr, in writing to a community of Christians about a fearful persecution which he saw about to come upon them, said, "The Nativity of Christ commenced forthwith with the martyrdom of infants, so that they who were two years old and under were put to death for His name's sake."

This shows how closely the memorial of the Holy Innocents was associated with Christmas Day. And there are different reasons why the thoughts that have lately been all joyful should so soon be turned toward scenes of suffering. The memory of the sorrows and sufferings of our Lord's life on earth must follow quickly on the thought of His coming; but, also, may we not think of the martyrs laying down their lives for Him as an expression of the desire to give of our best in return for the great gift on Christmas Day?

St. Thomas the Apostle is remembered on December 21st. The gospels tell us very little about him, except the story of his disbelief in the resurrection and his conviction by Christ's own words and touch. After the ascension he is said to have gone to the east, and preached the gospel to Parthians, Medes and Persians, and in India. He was martyred in Sumatra, being first stoned and then pierced with a spear.