

for a cause. I'm living for my community... and I will die to defend their rights."

During his three years as a minister, he did make significant progress in banning hate speech against minorities, establishing the study of comparative religion on the schools' curriculum, establishing a quota for minorities in the legislature, and persuading leaders of all faiths in Pakistan to issue a joint declaration against terrorism. It was his efforts to reform blasphemy laws, incomplete at the time of his death, that caused most controversy.



OUTPOURING OF LOVE

His older brother, Paul, working as a doctor in Italy, returned for the funeral. He subsequently agreed to become the next Minister for Minority Affairs, moved by witnessing so many Pakistanis, Muslims among them, who turned out that day in an outpouring of love for his dead brother. Paul revealed publicly that he had forgiven the assassins. It is through such forgiveness that martyrdom can transform social and political life. In 2016, the cause for Bhatti's beatification began. "He was an angel for Pakistan," said his cousin, Father Emmanuel Parvez, at a Mass in 2020 to mark the anniversary of his death, "a gift of God to the nation".

Peter Stanford is a Catholic writer and broadcaster (peterstanford.org). His latest book, *Pilgrimage*, is published by Thames & Hudson.

Mass text

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

**O God, come to my assistance;
O Lord, make haste to help me!
You are my rescuer, my help;
O Lord, do not delay.**

FIRST READING Exodus 16:2-4. 12-15

PSALM Psalm 77

RESPONSE **The Lord gave them bread from heaven.**

1. The things we have heard and understood, the things our fathers have told us, we will tell to the next generation: the glories of the Lord and his might. **R.**
2. He commanded the clouds above and opened the gates of heaven. He rained down manna for their food, and gave them bread from heaven. **R.**
3. Mere men ate the bread of angels. He sent them abundance of food. He brought them to his holy land, to the mountain which his right hand had won. **R.**

SECOND READING Ephesians 4:17. 20-24

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

**Alleluia, alleluia!
Man does not live on bread alone,
but on every word that comes from the mouth
of God.
Alleluia!**

GOSPEL John 6:24-35

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

**I am the bread of life, says the Lord;
whoever comes to me will not hunger
and whoever believes in me will not thirst.**

Next Sunday's Readings:
1 Kings 19:4-8
Ephesians 4:30 – 5:2
John 6:41-51



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SUNDAY BULLETIN

THINKING FAITH

SHAHBAZ BHATTI

Shahbaz Bhatti was leaving his mother's house in Islamabad, the Pakistani capital, on the morning of 2 March 2011. He had called in to see her on his way to work in the official government car that went with his job as Minister for Minority Affairs. As his driver pulled off, the car was sprayed with bullets. The driver survived, but forty-one-year-old Bhatti died on his way to the local hospital.

Just under two per cent of Pakistan's population is Christian in a country that is ninety-five per cent Muslim. As a minority, they have long faced persecution, marginalisation and even violence, despite the country's revered independence leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah's public commitment to build a tolerant secular society where religious freedom was respected. It was in an effort to return to this founding vision that Bhatti had finally agreed, three years earlier (he had turned down two previous offers), to become his country's first-ever Cabinet-level minister for "National Harmony".

Born into a middle-class family in Lahore and raised as a Catholic, he had been, since his student days, a vocal and indefatigable campaigner against the harsh blasphemy laws in the country, which he believed had been used to marginalise and oppress non-Muslims. In office, he received a constant flow of death threats, which only increased in number after he supported the legal appeal by a Christian woman, Asia Bibi, against the death sentence she had been handed by a court for blasphemy (an appeal that was finally upheld in 2018). He refused to be intimidated, intervening in 2009 in a headline-making outbreak of inter-community violence in Gojra in Punjab, where eight Christians had been killed and houses burnt to the ground. He went to the town's police station with relatives of the dead and refused to leave until officers had taken their statements about the crimes that had been committed. He saw his work in government as a mission to convey "a message of hope to the people living a life of disappointment, disillusionment and despair".

Muslim extremists of the Tehrik-i-Taliban group claimed responsibility for his murder in 2011. Bhatti had long since anticipated such a violent end to his life as the potential cost for doing what he felt called to do. He had chosen not to marry, he said, because he did not want to leave behind a family of fatherless children. He bequeathed a video message to be played in the event of his murder. "The forces of violence want to impose their radical philosophy," he told the camera, "[but] I believe in Jesus Christ, who has given his own life for us. I know what is the meaning of the cross and I am following it. And I am ready to die

Martyrs of our times



Peter Stanford looks at the life and martyrdom of a man described as an "angel for Pakistan".



1 AUGUST 2021

18TH SUNDAY IN
ORDINARY TIME

YEAR B

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK II