



my Church and my family to remember that my life was GIVEN [his capitals] to God and to this country." He firmly rebutted any suggestion that the monks had been naive or idealistic to stay put, and forgave "with all my heart the one who would strike me down". He prayed that in the next life God would "immerse my gaze in that of the Father to contemplate with him his children of Islam just as he sees them, all shining with the glory of Christ, the fruit of his Passion, filled with the Gift of the Spirit whose secret joy will always be to establish communion and restore the likeness, playing with the differences".

WITNESS OF LOVE

At the time of the monks' deaths, St John Paul II publicly praised their "witness of love". In December 2018, the seven, along with twelve other Algerians who had died for their faith, were beatified in a ceremony at the Catholic cathedral in Oran, the first to take place in a Muslim nation. And today Notre Dame de L'Atlas, now run by a small resident community from the French Catholic Chemiq Neuf movement, stands as a living memorial to the monks' commitment to interfaith bridge-building. In 2019, ninety-five-year-old Father Jean-Pierre Schumacher, who had survived the attack, met Pope Francis. "It's God who drove that history," he told the pontiff. "What happened to that monastery became an image for the entire world. An image of reconciliation. It's a call to all today."

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

Mass text

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

**Look to your covenant, O Lord,
and forget not the life of your poor ones for ever.
Arise, O God, and defend your cause,
and forget not the cries of those who seek you.**

FIRST READING 1 Kings 19:4-8

PSALM Psalm 33

RESPONSE Taste and see that the Lord is good.

1. I will bless the Lord at all times,
his praise always on my lips;
in the Lord my soul shall make its boast.
The humble shall hear and be glad. **R.**
2. Glorify the Lord with me.
Together let us praise his name.
I sought the Lord and he answered me;
from all my terrors he set me free. **R.**
3. Look towards him and be radiant;
let your faces not be abashed.
This poor man called; the Lord heard him
and rescued him from all his distress. **R.**

4. The angel of the Lord is encamped
around those who revere him, to rescue
them.
Taste and see that the Lord is good.
He is happy who seeks refuge in him. **R.**

SECOND READING Ephesians 4:30 – 5:2

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

**Alleluia, alleluia!
I am the living bread which has come down
from heaven,
says the Lord.
Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever.
Alleluia!**

GOSPEL John 6:41-51

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

**The bread that I will give, says the Lord,
is my flesh for the life of the world.**

Next Sunday's Readings:
Apocalypse 11:19; 12:1-6. 10
1 Corinthians 15:20-26
Luke 1:39-56

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SUNDAY BULLETIN

THINKING FAITH

THE MONKS OF OUR LADY OF THE ATLAS

At one o'clock in the morning on 27 March 1996, militants from the Armed Islamic Group, fundamentalist Muslims caught up in a civil war with the secular Algerian government over a disputed general election in 1991, forced their way into the monastery of Notre Dame de L'Atlas, at Tibhirine in the remote mountainous region of Medea. They kidnapped seven of the Cistercian Trappist monks who followed the *Rule of St Benedict* there, missing two others in a different part of the building. Their plan was initially to exchange the seven, aged between forty-five and eighty-two, for one of their jailed leaders, but on 21 May they announced they had murdered all seven by beheading (though a subsequent inquiry suggested the monks may have died during a botched attempt to rescue them).

Their bodies were never found, but the skulls of the Prior, Christian de Chergé, Brother Luc, Father Christophe, Brother Michel, Father Bruno, Father Célestin and Brother Paul were laid to rest in the grounds of the monastery that had been their home. Brother Luc, the eldest of the group and a doctor, had single-handedly run the clinic there for fifty years, treating an estimated 800,000 local people. Founded in 1938, Notre Dame de L'Atlas was somewhere the monks shared the lives of the local Muslim population, tending commonly held land dotted with chestnut trees, and in a practical, everyday fashion breaking down misunderstandings between their two faiths. Many Catholics of French origin had left Algeria in 1962 after its war of independence, but it was the monks' sense of themselves not only as a religious community, but as part of the wider community at Tibhirine, that made them stay in 1996 after threats had been issued against them by the militants.

Their steadfastness, and the esteem in which they were held by those who lived and worked alongside them, were explored in an award-winning 2010 film, *Of Gods and Men*, but it is the last testament of the prior, Dom Christian – who is said to have spent as much time studying the Quran as the Bible – that has subsequently proved inspirational, not just to those who risk their lives for their faith, but also in the field of Catholic-Muslim relations.

"If it should happen one day – and it could be today – that I become a victim of the terrorism which now seems ready to engulf all the foreigners living in Algeria," he began, "I would like my community,

Martyrs of our times



Peter Stanford reflects on how members of a religious community gave up their lives for their faith and for the people among whom they lived.



8 AUGUST 2021

19TH SUNDAY IN
ORDINARY TIME

YEAR B

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK III