

- Very interesting reading from the prophet Zechariah today:
- “...and they shall look on him whom they have pierced...on that day there shall be open...a fountain to purify from sin and uncleanness.”
- Zechariah prophesied this around 600 B.C...and yet it corresponds exactly to what happened with Jesus—the piercing with the nails... the piercing with the soldier’s lance...there on the cross—this historical event of Jesus’ self-sacrifice which redeems us, and opens that fountain which purifies us from sin and uncleanness.
- To the scoffer we might ask: “*How could a prophecy—verifiably written centuries before Jesus—have come true so exactly without supernatural guidance?*” ...just one of many Messianic prophecies fulfilled in the actions of—and TO—Jesus Christ.
- The Messiah—the anointed one of God—came not as a great warrior-king as expected, but rather as one who loves beyond love...who gave His own life for the good of those whom He cherishes.

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- Now our second reading is from Paul’s letter to the Galatians, and his main purpose is to warn the Galatians that they are being led astray by false evangelists.
 - One of the most poignant phrases in that letter (which we do not read today) is: “...*there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed...For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.*” (Galatians 1:7-12)
 - And...even when you simply review Paul’s historical actions, how can his revelation from Christ NOT be true?...for he turned in a moment from persecuting Christians violently to becoming an

ardent Christian...eventually becoming Christianity's greatest defender, teacher and apologist...not even conferring with the apostles until years later.

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- Those false teachers were telling the Galatians that they had to follow the Jewish ceremonial laws, but Paul says “no”...the ceremonial laws are fulfilled and exceeded in Christ. Yet, we are still bound to the moral law of God.
- Paul says that the baptized have “*clothed yourselves with Christ*”, recalling the white garment they would have been clothed with at baptism, symbolizing the cleansing of their sin and their enfolding into the Body of Christ.
- And then he says: “*There is neither Jew nor Greek...neither slave nor free person...[nor] male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*”
- This represents a self-realization of Paul as well...for Paul was the extremely zealous Jew prior to his conversion, and one of the prayers that he would have recited daily in the Jewish liturgy would have included thanksgiving of having not been made: “*...a Gentile, a slave or a woman.*”
- But Paul is now reversing this, teaching that, in Christ, old distinctions are gone; all are of equal status of grace before God through the love and sacrifice of Christ.
- ...not meaning that we're all the same; equality does not imply “sameness”. Both Paul & Jesus tell us that each person has his own gifts, abilities and capabilities.
- Remember Jesus' parable about the servants who were given different quantities of gold to invest?...and yet each was called the good and faithful servant if he invested it to the best of his ability, and did not let the gift entrusted to him languish unutilized.
- For instance...in earthly standards, Mary and Joseph were nothing...not even worth notice. And yet, in the standards of God

—faith, humility and service—they are the highest and the most honored of saints.

- But the baptismal garment comes with a price; it is not a luxurious garment of silk, but made of the rough wood of the cross...for Jesus tells us in the Gospel today: *“If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”*
- But what is the cross? Yes, yes...it was an instrument of torture, but what leads to the torture? Why were many placed upon the cross? Because of love.
- Jews were crucified for being rebels against Roman rule...because of love of God and country. Spartacus and his band of slaves were crucified for love of freedom.
- What parents among you have the daily cross of an errant son...a wayward daughter? And yet you bear it for love...one of perhaps many crosses we encounter in life.
- How much more so, then, should we be ready to take up our cross because of love of our God and Heavenly Father.
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- Jesus, Paul, Peter, all the saints...assure us that to remain with Christ...to remain with God at all...will be to be opposed by the world.
- St Augustine wrote:
 - *“There is courage in a man who faces rather than flees the storms of life, and who holds cheap the opinion of men. Earthly life... is a school training him for life eternal...in which his strength is put to the test and his character purified by the crosses he has to bear”* (The City of God, I.22).
- And St. Paul writes: *“...we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us,*

because God's love has been poured into our hearts..." (Romans 5:3-5)

- And...if we flee the cross, to whom shall we go? It is Christ who has the words of eternal life.
- The reward of fidelity? St. Paul tells us today: *"In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith...you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs [of the kingdom] according to promise."*
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- Very often in the Gospel of Luke we hear Jesus say: "I MUST [do this or that]...I MUST be in my Father's house...I MUST preach the good news...the Son of Man MUST suffer many things..."
- What is this "MUST"? He could flee the persecution coming to Him...but in obedience to God the Father, He endured all to fulfill His mission of salvation. God's will is His will.
- Likewise, especially in our day and age, we must steel ourselves with the same determination... encouraging ourselves daily: "Regardless of all else that happens in my life, I will NOT be unfaithful to Christ!"... always in our mind's eye recalling that ultimate and unbreakable promise of God to His faithful of eternal life and joy.
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- And so...let us take up our cross daily with courage and strength... given by God's grace...and repeat with the prophet Samuel: *"Speak, Lord...your servant is listening."*

Reading 1

[Zec 12:10-11; 13:1](#)

Thus says the LORD:

I will pour out on the house of David
and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem
a spirit of grace and petition;

and they shall look on him whom they have pierced,
and they shall mourn for him as one mourns for an only son,
and they shall grieve over him as one grieves over a firstborn.

On that day the mourning in Jerusalem shall be as great
as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo.

On that day there shall be open to the house of David
and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem,
a fountain to purify from sin and uncleanness.

[Ps 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9](#)

Responsorial Psalm

R. (2b) **My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.**

O God, you are my God whom I seek;
for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts
like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water.

R. **My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.**

Thus have I gazed toward you in the sanctuary
to see your power and your glory,
For your kindness is a greater good than life;
my lips shall glorify you.

R. **My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.**

Thus will I bless you while I live;
lifting up my hands, I will call upon your name.
As with the riches of a banquet shall my soul be satisfied,
and with exultant lips my mouth shall praise you.

R. **My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.**

You are my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I shout for joy.
My soul clings fast to you;
your right hand upholds me.

R. **My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.**

[Gal 3:26-29](#)

Reading 2

Brothers and sisters:

Through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus.

For all of you who were baptized into Christ
have clothed yourselves with Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek,
there is neither slave nor free person,
there is not male and female;

for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

And if you belong to Christ,
then you are Abraham's descendant,
heirs according to the promise.

[Lk 9:18-24](#)

Gospel

Once when Jesus was praying in solitude,
and the disciples were with him,
he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?"

They said in reply, "John the Baptist;
others, Elijah;

still others, 'One of the ancient prophets has arisen.'"

Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Peter said in reply, "The Christ of God."

He rebuked them

and directed them not to tell this to anyone.

He said, "The Son of Man must suffer greatly
and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes,
and be killed and on the third day be raised."

Then he said to all,

"If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself
and take up his cross daily and follow me.

For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it,
but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."