

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

St. Paul writes that he bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ. He suffered for the Gospel. In his Second Epistle to the Corinthians, he catalogs some of his suffering: From the Jews five times he received forty stripes minus one. Three times he was beaten with rods; once he was stoned; three times he was shipwrecked; a night and a day he suffered in the deep. In addition, he was bitten by a viper, but God protected him from harm.

The world tormented St. Paul as it tormented Paul's Lord, your Lord. Him they scourged, mocked, and crucified. Tradition records that St. Paul was beheaded, martyred for the Christian faith. He bore in his body the marks of the Lord. But Paul suffers no more. He is in the nearer presence of the very Lord He confessed. His faith has its reward.

Much could be said of the suffering of the Christian, the injuries to body and soul inflicted by this fallen world, and the joyous victory over suffering and death that the Christian has, won by Christ our Lord. Each of us has known difficulty, many of us have suffered, a few have suffered for the faith.

The wounds of Christian suffering are not always external. Many times they are injuries to reputation, injuries to feelings, broken relationships, cruel remarks, disapproving looks, and disdain from unbelievers. Christians are generally ridiculed by our society as being "no to smart," as clinging to their Bible rather than to education or reason. These injuries you have endured.

Of such St. Paul writes: I "count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ, and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith." Would that God grant each of us this mind, that we count the things of the world as rubbish, and treasure rather the things of the Kingdom of God.

But we are not ascetics. God gives daily bread. There is danger, spiritual danger, in forsaking the things of the world to the extent that we aim to earn holiness by our life. Whether this was true of St. Francis, only God knows. Born in the Year of our Lord 1181, converted to the Christian faith, Francis was moved by compassion for the beggars outside of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. He exchanged clothes with them and spent a day begging for alms.

Francis reported that upon hearing the Lord's admonition in Matthew 10 to "Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food", Francis understood the Words to be a personal "call" from God, and He did so.

He may have been ordained as a Deacon. Over time he founded the Franciscan Order, a few members at a time, and ultimately became Minister in General of the same. His "rule", the "Regula Bullata" was approved by Honorius III.

Here history ends and the oral tradition of the Franciscan Order begins. It is held that Francis was granted by the Lord the "stigmata", or the marks of the wounds of Christ on his own body, hence the Galatians reading on his commemoration. Francis, died of natural causes on this day in 1226 A.✠ D.

Of the monastic, ascetic life Luther wrote "... those who have rejected the Word of true hope and trust, and are therefore wrapped up in the word of false hope and lying. With them there is no end of commanding, of awaiting, and of admonishing, and yet everything is futile... who have spurned God's mercy and Word and fall into various futile works and mock themselves with their uncertain opinions, which they prefer to the divine Word."

Sinners certainly made great gain, godless gain, of the monastic life in the time before Luther. Striving to keep the Eighth Commandment, let us say that out of faith, for pious and genuine desire to please God, Francis entered into such a life. God alone knows his heart. The church calls him saint.

Increased devotion and holiness of living would benefit each of us, with the caveat that the Chief Article of the Christian faith, justification by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, be preserved as the center of our teaching and faith.

And as for Francis' stigmata, God could do that, but has never promised to do so, nor has He attached a promise to such signs. So let us rather place our confidence in the wounds that avail for our salvation, the wounds of Christ – It is He that exchanged celestial raiment for beggars clothes, of which he was stripped and ridiculed.

His thorn-torn brow, His shoulders chafed by the gibbet of the cross, His hands and feet pierced for you, His lifeless side violently opened that the Blood and Water of your eternal life issued forth.

For it is in His death that your sins, even the sins of desiring and attempting to earn holiness by your works, are forgiven. It

is by His suffering and death that your transgressions are removed, by His glorious resurrection and ascension that you are declared righteous, and heaven is opened to you.

In a very real sense, you bear the mark of Christ, the baptismal seal with which He marked you as you were filled with His Spirit. It is through His wounds that you enter the One, Holy, catholic and Apostolic Church, entering by Water and Blood, incorporated into the Body of Christ through the Font.

In love, in true compassion, He sustains you in His Body, the Church, by the Holy Eucharist, declared righteous in Christ, and by His Mysteries He works in you true growth in sanctification.

And of the earthly marks and imperfections your body bears, of the injuries you have endured for the faith, they will all be transformed into perfection as you receive your glorified body on the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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