

The Fourteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
(Year C)

<i>First Reading</i>	Isaiah 66:10-14C
<i>Response</i>	Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 66:1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 16, 20
<i>Second Reading</i>	Galatians 6:14-18
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	Let the peace of Christ control your hearts; let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.
<i>Gospel</i>	Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

On the 14th Sunday for Ordinary Time in Year C, the Church brings us to the end of our journey through Paul's letter to the Galatians, with his climactic statements about the relationship between the cross and the new creation in Galatians 6:14-18. So let's read the last words of this powerful, powerful letter. Paul writes:

But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God. Henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.

So much here to talk about. Okay, so let's begin by remembering the context. Remember that the context of the letter to the Galatians is Paul's polemic...it's his most polemical letter against his opponents who were telling the recent converts in Galatia that they had to be circumcised in order to be saved. So Paul brings it to its climax by saying that the only thing we can glory in is the cross of Jesus Christ. Now, at this point you might think, yeah that's right, because it's through the cross that salvation comes. But then Paul says something that I suspect you, or at least I would not have said about the cross. He says:

[F]ar be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

What does that mean? That through the cross, “the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” Well, if you want the answer, you have to look at the next line because notice what he says:

For [which connects it] neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

Now, if you've been journeying with me through the letters of St. Paul, you'll know that over and over and over again, I've suggested that one of the keys to understanding Paul's thought is understanding the ancient Jewish idea of two worlds or two ages. The old creation, or this age, this world, and the new creation or the world to come, the age to come. And I love this passage because here Paul makes explicit what is often implicit in his letters, namely that the undergirding insight, or the foundational thought, that underlies all of his theology is what has happened in Christ through the coming of the new creation.

And so here he makes explicit that the reason we only glory in the cross and the reason circumcision doesn't count for anything, or uncircumcision for that matter, is that a new creation has come. The Greek word here is *kainē ktisis*. So what Paul reveals when he talks about this distinction between the old and new creation, and he links the cross to the coming of the new creation, is this, when Jesus was crucified on Calvary, according to Paul, it wasn't just his body that was put to death. It wasn't just his body that was crucified, but it was that his body, which is a part of this creation...he's from the dust. He's a man of the dust, he's a son of Adam. That when his body, which is made from this creation, was crucified, in some real sense the world itself, the old world, the old creation, the fallen world, was also put to death on Calvary. The world was crucified on Calvary.

That's why Paul actually uses the word *cosmos*. When he says “the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” The Greek is “*the cosmos* has been crucified to me, and I to the *cosmos*.” So if you look for example at the chart I have here of these two spheres, the old creation and the new creation, this world and the world to come. What you'll see is that according to Paul, through the cross of Christ, we die to the old world. We die to the world in which circumcision was required—like under the old covenant—where things like circumcision and uncircumcision mattered. Now we become members of the world to come, of the new creation, by

being members of Christ, because Christ was crucified to this world, but he didn't just die in the resurrection, he also rose up. And in his body, he's the beginning of the new creation. He's the beginning of a whole new world in which there's no more sin, there's no more death, there's no more dying anymore.

So Paul's argument is so sophisticated here, it's so profoundly theological that it's easy for us sometimes to miss it. Paul is not saying, note this, he's not saying that Gentiles don't have to be circumcised because it's a difficult procedure and we're not going to make a lot of converts. He's not giving practical reasons that circumcision isn't necessary. He's giving Christological, theological, cosmological reasons. He's saying, if you have been baptized into Christ, if you have faith in Christ and have been baptized, then you've already become part of the new creation in which circumcision or uncircumcision doesn't matter anymore, because you're a member of the body of Christ, of the mystical body of Christ.

Therefore, for someone who's been baptized to go back and receive circumcision—which is what people are trying to get the Galatians to do—would be like someone in the new creation going back to the old creation. It doesn't make any sense. And so Paul says, “Our glory is not in the honor that being circumcised would bring to us.” Which is what some of his opponents were trying to do, saying if you want to be a real follower of Christ, you have to follow the whole law, you have to be circumcised. But he says, no, that's not where our glory comes from. Our glory comes from the cross of Christ, through which “the cosmos has been crucified to me, and I to the cosmos. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” is what matters. And then he says:

Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God.

In other words, if you want to belong to Israel, the Israel of God, the way you get into Israel, become a member of the people, is not any longer through circumcision, but through participation in the cross of Christ, which according to Paul earlier in the letter he's going to say is through faith and baptism. So I just think this is such a powerful, powerful passage in Paul, because it reveals to us the deeper logic of why he believes circumcision is not necessary. It's not because circumcision is bad. It's not because the law of Moses is bad. It's because both of those things belong to the old creation. And if you believe in Christ and you've been baptized, you don't belong to the old creation anymore. You've literally been

made a new creation in Christ. And as a member of his body, you belong to the new creation. Even though visibly, you're still living in this fallen world, you have your foot so to speak in two different worlds at the same time. Visibly, you live in the old creation, but invisibly and sacramentally, you're now a member of the mystical body of Christ. You're a member of the new Israel of God, that is the church. And that's how he brings his argument to a climax with those verses.

But he does add one little addition right at the end here against his opponents. He says:

Henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

In other words, in addition to all of his arguments from scripture, Paul's credentials are established by the fact that his own body bears witness to his union with Christ crucified to the cross. Now, one of the things you might notice, especially if you're a first year Greek student and you're working through the Galatians... I remember I got really excited the first time I saw that passage in Greek, because what he says literally is "I bear in my body, the stigmata of Jesus." The Greek word there for mark is *stigmata*. This passage has led some people to wonder, "Oh, well did Paul bear the actual marks of Jesus?" In other words, was Paul a stigmatic? Did he have the visible signs of the wounds of Christ on his hands and feet or on his side, as various saints have had throughout the history of the Church. This is something that you'll see, this is a phenomena that you'll see in the history of the Church. And at least as far as my research has turned up, I can't find any Saint in the tradition who has interpreted Paul's reference to the stigmata of Jesus in Galatians 6 in a literal way as a reference to the wounds that mimic the wounds of Christ.

Most interpreters see in this a reference to the wounds on his body, the marks that he gained as a result of the opposition and persecution that he faced in spreading the Gospel throughout the Roman empire. So for example, in 2 Corinthians 6 and in 2 Corinthians 11 in particular, Paul talks about having received the forty lashes minus one, being beaten in various synagogues. He recounts even being stoned one time, which by the way, they didn't stop until they thought you were dead. So stoning was a method of execution, not just a method of persecution. So Paul has experienced great physical sufferings for the sake of the Gospel, which apparently left his body permanently scarred. And so as a testament to his union with Christ

crucified, he says, if any of my opponents want to still make trouble for me, then just look at the wounds, look at the marks on my body, look at the stigmata, the marks of Christ, and realize that I'm practicing what I'm preaching, so to speak. I don't glory in anything except the cross of Christ, through which "the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." For Paul, he has died to this old creation, although he is still living in it, he's still a man, it isn't his home anymore. He's detached from it, and the sign of his detachment from it are the very wounds that his body bears as a testament to his commitment to spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that all might enter into the glory and the gift of the new creation.

So in closing, just a little highlight from the tradition here. Whenever I read this verse about Paul saying "I was crucified to the world, and the world was crucified to me", it always makes me think of a passage in the Catechism that talks about mortification. Now this is a word...it's not a very popular word. When you talk about being mortified, we tend to use it to describe being scared to death. So "I was mortified." Or if we think about mortification, we might think of some of the more severe penances that throughout the history the saints have imposed on themselves.

But the reality of the fact is that mortification at its very root is about dying to this world so that we might rise with Christ. And so there's a beautiful passage in the Catechism of the Catholic church. It's in paragraph 2015. I would just call your attention to it as a meditation on what Paul is talking about here when he talks about being crucified to the world. That's a Pauline way of describing what would later come to be known as a spirit of mortification. And this is what the Catechism says about the role of mortification in our own spiritual growth.

The way of perfection passes by way of the Cross. There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle. Spiritual progress entails the asceticism and mortification that gradually lead to living in the peace and joy of the Beatitudes.

So notice, what this Catechism saying there? If you want to be holy, you can't do it without dying to this world. If you want to be holy, you can't do it without the spiritual exercises of rooting out vices and growing in virtue. And if you want to be holy, you can't do it without the mortification, the detachment, the renunciation to this world, the renunciation of this world, dying to the pleasures of this world. Not because this world is intrinsically bad, but because this world has fallen and

because through Christ, we've been made members of a new world, a better world, a new creation.

We die to the old in order to live to the new. And it's only through those things: renunciation, asceticism and mortification, being crucified with Christ, that we actually can begin to live in the peace and the joy of the Beatitudes. In other words, there's no way to get to the joy of Easter Sunday by going around the suffering and the cross of Good Friday. It's only through the cross of Good Friday that we can actually ever taste the joy of Easter Sunday and the joy of the new creation. And Paul knew that firsthand, and that's why his ultimate argument to the Galatians about circumcision is one that's eschatological. It's one that's christological. It's the argument that if Christ died to this world in order to rise for the next one, then we have to do the same thing. We have to do the same thing. We have to follow Paul, follow Jesus and die to this world so that we might live, not just for the cross, but for the resurrection.