

12<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Time Year "C"  
June 22-23, 2013

*They shall look upon him whom they pierced*

Readings: Zechariah 12: 10-11; 13:1; Gal 3:26-29; Luke 9:18-24

It is a safe bet that when Jesus said, "I am the way, the Truth, and the life," his words were easily interpreted. Such is not always the case in biblical passages. Take a verse in today's 1<sup>st</sup> reading: "They shall look upon him whom they have pierced." (Zechariah 12:10) It is quoted in St. John's Gospel; it appears again in the Book of Revelation; it even appears in the text of George Frideric Handel's *Messiah*. And yet it is emblematic of the difficulty in trying to interpret Old Testament texts in the light of the New Testament, and to see these prophecies as meaningful in our time.

The figure of him upon whom they gazed has obvious Messianic overtones. But, to whom exactly does the term "pierced one" refer? Could it be a suffering servant, King Josiah, the martyrs of Israel, or an historical figure who had been murdered? It does not say, and not surprisingly, has been the source of much speculation. As *the Catechism of the Catholic Church* puts it: "The glorious Messiah's coming is suspended at every moment of history until his recognition by 'all Israel,' for 'a hardening has come upon part of Israel' in their 'unbelief' toward Jesus".<sup>1</sup>

This was the understanding of many Church Fathers, that in the end, all the nations will come to accept Christ. In the early 2<sup>nd</sup> c., Christians numbered only 50,000 out of 60 Million in the Empire; most Romans had never even heard of Jesus. Make no mistake about it: "the promises of God to Israel remain valid. The Hebrew Scriptures, containing God's promises, have enduring value, but are to be interpreted in the light of Christ to whom they point forward."<sup>2</sup> Today's prophecy in Zechariah is no exception.

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<sup>1</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph # 674.

<sup>2</sup> Avery Dulles, "Covenant and Mission," *America Magazine* 21 October 2002

Vatican II taught that God offers the possibility of salvation to all who conscientiously strive with his help to find His truth and do His will. Explicit Christian faith, while it is a great blessing, must always be free and un-coerced. When Pope Francis said that Christ redeemed all, even the atheist, his comments are to be interpreted in this light, and not as if he were saying that belief does not matter. The Catechism of the Catholic Church confirms, “Christ died for all men without exception: ‘There is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer.’”<sup>3</sup>

But Christ’s redemptive sacrifice is not the same as salvation. To redeem means to “buy back,” or to “restore.” Salvation comes from accepting this redemption and applying it in our lives. We have a much better chance of this happening by taking on all that our faith has to offer. Why would we ever want to jealously guard this knowledge for ourselves?

Recently, a woman of about 60 wandered into the sacristy. We had propped the door open for some fresh air following a storm. She had a little girl of about 8 years old with her (her granddaughter I presumed) and went onto explain that the girl knows nothing about religion, and that she was hoping to show her some statues and teach her something about Jesus and the faith. I gladly let her in and pointed in the right direction, welcoming the little girl. This is more and more typical; this is evangelization.

Bl. Pope John Paul II wrote that “...missionary evangelization is the primary service that the Church can render to every individual and all humanity in the modern world.”<sup>4</sup> The call to conversion corresponds to the **right** of every person to hear the good news of the God who gives himself in Christ, including that little girl.

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<sup>3</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph # 605

<sup>4</sup> Pope John Paul II, encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio*, No. 2, 7 December 1990.

When Jesus said to Peter and the disciples, “From now on you will be catching men,” he was indicating that their very life’s purpose was changing. Their former trade was to be exchanged for a mission of evangelization. Far from denying from where they came, they set out on a new course, one that would be utterly life changing.

But from where did their power come, from whom? What empowered them to endure such suffering, such trials, misunderstanding and even rejection? They would gain their strength for this mission from the power or love flowing from the Cross. Pope Benedict taught that when we gaze upon Christ pierced in the cross, we see the un-surpassing revelation of God’s love: “On the Cross, it is God Himself who begs the love of His creature: He is thirsty for the love of every one of us.”<sup>5</sup>

Today, the task before us is the *new* evangelization, an effort to re-energize the faith of those who have been raised Catholic, but for all sorts of reasons have fallen tepid and have become disconnected. But they thirst for Him, and we have the opportunity to help them satisfy that thirst. I see it– I sense that thirst in the many who come through these doors. You have a critical role to play in this work of evangelization. God bless your efforts. They are bearing fruit.

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<sup>5</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, 21 November 2006, Vatican City.