

**12th Sunday of the Year (Cycle C)**  
(Zec 12:10-11; 13:1; Gal 3:26-29; Luke 9:18-24)

I know that none of you are old enough to remember when the liturgy provided only two readings, but it is true, there was a time when, week after week, there was only epistle and gospel. I've mentioned before that one liturgist said that the introduction of the OT readings was a pastoral disaster, that people wouldn't sit still that long. You people have proved him wrong. How many are glad we now have an OT reading? (raise hand.) Without the OT much of the NT would be unintelligible. For example, today's second reading tells us we are Abraham's children. Anyone here have a father named Abraham? Unless we knew something about the OT, it wouldn't make sense.

However, if we are to have the OT, the passage read needs to be intelligible. If it isn't, it needs to be explained. That is the homilist's responsibility. I'm kind of sorry I raised the question because to raise it is to open a can of worms: no one knows for sure who has been pierced in this passage. That makes you wonder why the liturgists included it in the lectionary. Who is the one whom they have pierced? The best explanation is that it is a personification of the true prophet. There is mention of the "house of David" (synonym for the king) and "Jerusalem." The kings had been known to put prophets to death, and of Jerusalem Jesus had said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you." At least, as we learn, these people now have the grace to mourn the one they have pierced. The mourning is as if for an only son, a firstborn, as great as that in the plain of Megiddo. The last is probably a reference to Josiah, the best of their kings, slain on the plain of Megiddo and greatly mourned.

In spite of the problems of this text, the liturgists can be blest for its inclusion. Today's gospel is about Jesus' passion and death, and in John's crucifixion scene, this text is cited, "They will look on him whom they have pierced." John has another passage from the OT that he sees fulfilled in Jesus' death scene: "not a bone of it will be broken." This not a prophecy but an instruction for cooking and eating the Passover lamb. John wishes to identify Jesus as the Paschal Lamb of the New Covenant, so this fits very well. The "they shall look on him whom they have pierced" also is apt if the OT phrase did, in fact, refer to the true prophet, executed by the authorities.

So the reason the liturgists provided us with this difficult passage is that it puts us in mind of Jesus' suffering and death, which is what our gospel reading is about.

This gospel from Luke begins with Jesus asking His disciples who people say He is; after they have related the common opinions, Jesus asks them. "But who do YOU say that I am." The same event is depicted also in Matthew and Mark. Peter always gives the answer; but it comes in somewhat different wording. In Matthew, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God"; in Mark, "You are the Messiah," and here in Luke, "The Messiah of God." Translation according to the revised NAB translation. The lectionary always has the "the Christ" instead of "Messiah." Peter is clearly confessing Jesus as the Messiah expected by Israel, but the lectionary never uses that term. For no clear reason, those who revised it in

Rome did not allow the term in the lectionary.

At any rate, each of the three passages is followed by Jesus' prediction of His suffering and death; and that is followed by the invitation: "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." Jesus had warned His followers that they will be subject to persecution--cast out of the synagogue, hailed before judges and kings, put to death. When Jesus says "deny yourself," He doesn't mean like giving up cigarets or candy. We've heard of saints who have practiced heroic mortifications, but Jesus didn't mean that. Jesus came "eating and drinking" so that His enemies could accuse Him of being "a glutton and a drunkard." "To deny oneself" means rather to disown oneself, renounce one's own will, renounce old securities and self-love. Jesus, in His agony in the Garden, went from "Abba, Father, let this chalice pass me by" to "if this chalice cannot pass by without my drinking it, your will be done." THAT is self-renunciation.

But St. Luke adds the word "daily" after "take up your cross." In the earliest days of the Church, martyrdom was a real possibility, as Jesus had warned--as in fact it is now and always has been. Since crucifixion (or any kind of death) is a one time only event, St. Luke's addition of "daily" suggests a way of living our life on a daily basis. How do we do this? To "deny ourselves" still means, "to disown oneself," "to renounce one's own will and self-love." To do this is to live for others rather than for oneself, just as Jesus death on the cross was his supreme act of love for us.

I have little admiration for the saint, whoever it was, who said, "My greatest penance is the communal life." It seems to me that if one truly loves others, he or she seeks to see how lovable they are, so living together would be the greatest joy. Certainly we all have little or great idiosyncrasies that jar on others, even though we are not aware of them. However, we can choose to dwell rather on the lovable qualities of others, instead of what annoys us.

But this isn't really enough. To bear our cross daily, as Jesus bore His cross, is something positive, to love and to seek to do good to others. In the early days of the Church, even the pagans, we are told, would exclaim, "See how these Christians love one another!" We can see this echoed in St. Paul's exhortations, often indicating that we should prefer others to ourselves. For example: in Romans, "love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor (12:10). Again, "Let us then pursue what leads to peace and to building up one another" (14:19). In Second Corinthians he tells us "to test the genuineness of your love by your concern for others" (8:8); "to encourage one another, agree with one another, live in peace" (13:11). In Galatians, "Serve one another through love" (5:13). In Ephesians, "Therefore, putting away falsehood, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, for we are members one of another" (4:25); "Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ" (4:32); "Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ" (5:2). In Philippians, "Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves" (2:3). In First Thessalonians, "Console one another ...." (4:18), and "Encourage one another and build one another up"

(5:11), and "See that no one returns evil for evil; rather, always seek what is good (both for each other and for all" (5:15). Some of these are echoed by Our Holy Father St. Benedict in his Rule: he tells us that "no one is to pursue what he judges is better for himself, but instead what he judges better for another." That is certainly a high ideal. We may not respond very to it very well, but it is what we are called to do.

To motivate us to do better in this difficult task, we should remember that Christ died for us to give us this example and explained it in His own words: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." And we remember: He did it for us while we were still in our sins.