

**Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C
(June 20, 2004)**

Daily Crosses

Today's short reading from Galatians expresses a truth that we are still trying to actualize in our world and in our church: the unity and equality that must exist among all people. It's a major theme with St. Paul. Such a unity and equality came to be in the very act of creation as we are told in the book of Genesis when God created the human race in God's own image and likeness. Paul tell us that that is all the more true for us who are Christians because in Christ Jesus there is no distinction between Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. We haven't quite realized that degree of equality yet but significant steps have been taken along the way.

One thing we have to understand, of course, is that there are still differences. Paul did not try to deny that. National and ethnic differences remain; so too do differences in race, economic status, and gender. That is inevitable. But within the context of the faith, they assume little if any importance. If they ever become dominant or areas of conflict, then difference becomes division and the Christian life loses its meaning. Differences can enrich, but division destroys. It is sinful. And for us as Christians, unity in Christ respects differences, but overcomes division. And perhaps that is where this brief passage from the letter to the Galatians can link up with the Gospel passage we just heard. It sounds as though we have jumped back into Lent with Jesus telling the disciples and us that if we want to follow him we must deny ourselves, take up our crosses every day, and follow in his footsteps.

Let's look a little more closely at that. First of all Luke adds something to this incident that Matthew and Mark do not have when they recount the same thing. He adds the word "daily." Now is that significant? I think it is. First of all, cross-bearing for Jesus was not something that happened only at the end of his life. He, too, carried his cross daily. There were many times when he was tired from the great demands made upon him. That was a cross. He was often interrupted during his prayer because, as Peter says at one point, "Everybody is looking for you." How much he

would have rather stayed in close communion with the Father. But he knew that what the Father wanted was his service to the people. And in being that servant, even a suffering servant, he was fulfilling the will of the Father and his role as Messiah. And he had to do this every day.

The same is true for us. In our lives, you know, we don't have to go looking for crosses. The cross will come to us. The ordinary struggles of our daily lives: illness, the death of a loved one, coping with addictions, either our own or someone else's, poverty perhaps, political differences, scandal in the church, giving of ourselves to others, generous presence to someone in need. These are all our crosses and they are bound to come to all of us in one form or another. The question we must face is: are we willing to bear them. In one sense the question simply is: are we ready to accept who we are as human beings – not always an easy thing to do with our human limitations. But remember that Jesus in his humanity had those same limitations. And accepting them and living with them but continuing to work for the good of others was part of his cross, just as it is part of our cross.

The family of Robert Johnson who was brutally murdered in Saudi Arabia this past week will have a very big cross to bear at this time. So, too, will the families of all those who have died on both sides of the war. On this Father's Day it is fitting for us to remember that many of them were fathers, and in Robert Johnson's case, a grandfather as well.

Now we know that the equality that Paul talked about has not yet been fully achieved, either in our world or in our church. So it seems to me that our struggle to accomplish that is also part of our cross – and sometimes a very large part of it. We no longer have slavery, but we still have racism and bigotry in many, many forms. These cause the division that is sinful and do not respect the differences that can enrich us all. We perhaps theoretically accept equality between male and female. In fact the Pope wrote a letter about it some years ago. But there is still discrimination against women in the church in spite of the Pope's message. These divisions diminish us all and make us less than we are supposed to be, less than we have been destined to be by God almighty. Our struggles to overcome these injustices and inequalities are all part of our cross, the cross that Jesus says we must take up every day as we follow in his footsteps.

Now all of this might seem a bit of a downer, somewhat negative after the glow of the Easter season, Pentecost, Holy Trinity, and Corpus Christi. But it seems to me that the readings and liturgy for this first Sunday that we are celebrating today in Ordinary Time bring us back to the reality of our ordinary lives. This is where we live, in the blooming, buzzing confusion of a world that is sometimes messy. God has put us here as part of the bloom and the buzz and the confusion and the mess and has asked us to enter the struggle to help straighten it all out. We have a choice. We can sit back and say, "It doesn't concern me," and so be part of the problem because it does concern each and every one of us, or we can do what the Lord has asked us to do: take up our cross and be part of the solution. The cross of Jesus leads to Calvary, that's true. But remember, it did not end there. The footsteps of Jesus lead beyond Calvary to the Resurrection. And that, with the help of God, is where we are all headed.