

June 19, 2016
12th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Prepared by Fr. John Northrop, MM, El Salvador

Zechariah 12:10-11; 13:1; Psalm 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9; Galatians 3:26-29; Luke 9:18-24

These scripture passages fill us with a sense of wonder at God's grace and mysterious power at work in the world. It is only through the gift of faith that we can perceive it. It is this new vision that inspires and enables us to be Christ's missionary disciples in all circumstances. Our secular world has made fantastic strides in various technologies that boggle the mind. To what extent do they offer ultimate direction? All the science and creativity of the world cannot answer the deepest hungers of the human soul. Faith sheds light beyond all measure if we allow it to develop and mature through prayer and perseverance. Faith challenges us this Sunday, to contemplate and accept God's word letting it form us in our present reality. May it transform all our attitudes, and help us to see beyond the difficulties that we might be facing. Our faith convinces us that we are not alone. Christ is with us and acts through us. Through faith we come to know Jesus in a progressively personal way as "the Messiah of God." This gift leads us to acknowledge our own identity as members of his mystical body. Faith leads us more and more to experience that we are in Jesus as he is in us. May the gift of faith guide us to persevere in hope and be fruitful in God's love.

Contemplating on our scripture passages today, I cannot help but think of Margarita, a middle age mother from our parish in El Salvador. One day she spoke to me in desperation of her overwhelming hardships. As a woman of faith she was looking for ways to cope with her situation. She was living in poverty just within blocks of our parish church. How will she get enough food to adequately feed her children? How can she manage to pay all the debts that are presently confronting her? Where can she turn for relief? As I was partaking in her agony and wondering how I might console her, I thought of others in her situation who take the dangerous risk of leaving El Salvador to go north through Guatemala and Mexico to reach the United States in the hopes of finding gainful employment. Yes, they have heard the horrific stories of some who have dared to make this trek. How many did not survive the journey because of some accident along the way? Some have told me that they have not heard from loved ones ever since they left for the U.S. years ago. Nevertheless, some family members will say that anything is better than staying where they are now. What could I say to Margarita in her unbearable predicament?

It seems that Jesus is speaking directly to her through today's gospel because the only way to be his disciple is to take up one's cross daily and follow him. The expression, "to take up one's cross daily," must have shocked Jesus' listeners who knew first hand how dreadful the cross really was. Who would dare be his disciple, if crucifixion was the worst form of torture and death? It seems that while Peter and the other apostles were travelling with Our Lord to Jerusalem, they were intentionally deaf to those three times he foretold of his rejection by the religious leaders and his frightful passion and death. How could this be the Father's plan for his Son who was so powerful in word and deed? Wasn't there a better way? Truly the cross is a scandal to the Jew and foolishness to the non-Jew. Yet to the person of faith it is the wisdom and power of God.

Our Creator wants to lavish this gift of faith on all those who need him, including those who are far from him and need him most. Christians from age to age have seen Jesus as the fulfillment of our passage in the first reading from the book of Zechariah. We heard how the House of David will look upon the one whom they have pierced as “a firstborn,” who will be a source of grace and petition, a fountain of purity and freedom from sin.

Paul’s letter to the Galatians proclaims the awesome power of the resurrection, incorporating believers into a fantastic unity in Christ, freeing disciples of all divisions of race, social position, and gender.

The earnest questions and concerns voiced by Margarita as a modern-day disciple have constantly been on my mind and heart. I have prayed especially at Mass: “Lord, behold Margarita who more than anyone has followed your instructions to take up the cross daily and follow you. How will you speak to her and console her? To what extent does she believe that you are with her, sustaining her? How will she be blessed through your grace? She is indeed proving herself to be your disciple from day to day.”

Such a prayer has continued to be with me up to the present. If I were more a person of faith, I would not have been so surprised several weeks ago when I noticed that Margarita was among a group of women one Saturday morning training to be catechists. Maybe some of those women were in the same difficult situation as she. When she finishes her formation and starts teaching the children to whom she is sent, will she not be anointed and strengthened to do this through the power of the Holy Spirit? I have no doubt that she will. St. Paul speaks of the mighty power that is poured forth upon others by those proclaiming the cross of Jesus, and living it. May the Holy Spirit bless us, empower us, and send us to others as we, like Margarita, try to live in obedient faith through all of life’s difficult situations.

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200 New York Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20001

202-832-1780 ogc@maryknoll.org www.maryknollogc.org