

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 7, 2019

“From now on, let no one make troubles for me; for I bear the marks of Jesus on my body.”
(Galatians 6:17)

As he was concluding his letter to the Christian community of Galatia (modern Ankara, Turkey), Saint Paul spoke of “bearing the marks of Jesus” upon his body. Some scholars have theorized as to exactly what Saint Paul meant when he used this saying. During Paul’s lifetime, slaves were often branded with marks on their flesh to signify whose property they were. Also, ministers to pagan gods were likewise branded as a pledge of allegiance toward the god they served. The reason these scholars are puzzled is that Saint Paul used a certain Greek word which has come to represent a miraculous event in Christianity. This Greek word is - *Stigmata*.

Stigmata, in Catholic tradition, has come to be associated with the marks of the Passion which appear upon the bodies (hands, feet, side) of certain chosen individuals. The two most famous cases involve Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Padre Pio. Due to his relatively recent death, September 23, 1968, some present may remember Saint Padre Pio. His case of stigmata was quite famous and well-studied. Small libraries could be filled with the documentation from the various scientific studies conducted upon Saint Padre Pio. I would encourage anyone to invest time learning about this most extraordinary saint. His life and the ministry of Jesus he performed was truly amazing. Could Saint Paul be referring to these same mystical wounds when he wrote of his own stigmata? Or, could Saint Paul be referring to a more common form of stigmata; one which we all could share?

For the sake of this homily, let us focus upon this second, more common form of stigmata. Paul bore the marks of all of the sufferings he had undergone for the sake of the gospel. In his Second Letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul wrote concerning the many hardships he endured: *“Five times at the hands of the Jews I received forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I passed a night and a day on the deep; on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own race, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, dangers among false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many sleepless nights, through hunger and thirst, through frequent fastings, through cold and exposure. And apart from these things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches.”* (2 Corinthians 11:24-28) Yes, all of these experiences would leave visible “marks of Jesus.”

If these were the “marks of Jesus” Saint Paul was referring to, then how could we bear similar marks? We could bear similar marks because some scars are not visible. Saint Paul referred to these invisible marks as he wrote concerning his anxiety for those churches whom he had ministered to. These are the marks we share with Saint Paul and each other. All of us have been scarred each time we stood opposed to beliefs or actions which are counter to our Christian faith. We have been ridiculed, isolated, and marginalized for our opposition toward this culture of death and relativism. We have seen good people leave our Christian faith professing their “newly acquired, superior” knowledge. We have been accused of being “hate mongers” and so many other names, I can no longer keep up. Yes, all of these hurt. Yes, all of these leave scars. And, some of the deepest have come from those who are closest to us. We all bear the “marks of Jesus” upon our bodies. Therefore, let us, like Saint Paul, view these marks as badges of honor for His Name. Let us continue to stand opposed to those people and things which are contradictory to our catholic faith. Let us support our brothers and sisters who may feel weighed down by their own marks. Finally, let us thank Jesus for the privilege of bearing these “marks” and may we present to him a body glorified and blessed to be counted worthy to “bear the marks of Jesus.”