

Dear friends,

A couple, desperate to conceive a child, went to their priest and asked him to pray for them. "I'm going on a sabbatical to Rome," he replied, "and while I'm there, I'll light a candle for you." When the priest returned three years later, he went to the couple's house and found the wife pregnant, busily attending to two sets of twins. Elated, the priest asked her where her husband was so that he could congratulate him. "He's gone to Rome, to blow that candle out" came the harried reply.



Most of you know that I am going on a Sabbatical. During the month of August, will be doing Spanish at the Ixchel Spanish School, in Antigua, Guatemala. In September, I will minister in a Spanish Parish. I will be returning to CTK on the first of October. Please do keep me in your prayers.

Scar stories. I'm guessing everyone in this congregation has one, if not several. Our youth director used to tell me that scar stories are a favorite "get-to-know-you" game with our youth. They can be great conversation starters. I would like to start asking you to share your scar stories. I don't want you to remove your shirts and other pieces of fabric, to show them.

There truly is a story behind every scar. Some of the stories are painful; others are funny. Some are significant, while others, less so. Some are filled with shame, while others are full of pride. Yet without exception, every scar serves as a visible reminder of wounds we've incurred. St. Thomas the apostle, whose feast happens to be today after the resurrection said, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." The amazing thing about this story is that our God had scars that told a great story- story of his passionate love for us.

Why am I talking about scars? Paul the apostle in his letter to the Galatians said, "From now on, let no man trouble me for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" The context is this: The Judaizers in Galatia had sought to assail his authority as a teacher. Judaizers were Jews who had converted themselves to Christianity and insisted that Gentiles had to be circumcised before they could be Christians. St. Paul dismissed that theory. The Judaizers had drawn distinctions between him and the older apostles, and they had gone so far as to assert that he was not a real apostle at all. That had "troubled" him. That had wounded him. It was about his credibility as an apostle and servant of Jesus. So Paul gives his final answer to those who had cast doubts upon his apostolic authority and, in words that throb with a sense of wrong that he is called upon to prove his claim at all, says, "*From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear branded on my body the marks of Jesus.*"

**What Were These "Marks"?** What were these marks of the Lord Jesus? The word used in the Greek is *stigmata*. The word "stigma" which we use today is derived from the Greek word, which carries with it associations of shame and disgrace, and that is probably due to the special use to which the Greek word was put. Primarily, the word meant simply "spot" or "mark", but soon it came to stand specially for the marks that were cut or branded into a slave's body in order to identify him as his master's property. These marks proclaimed the fact of his servitude and, at the same time, indicated the master to whom he belonged. When Paul said "I bear the marks," he meant that The badges and signs of his servitude were

ineffaceably stamped upon him. Christ had put his sign upon him.

In Lystra the apostle was stoned. Afterward he was dragged from the city, and left for dead (Acts 14:19). Doubtless scars were left in the wake of that abuse.

At Philippi Paul (and Silas) were beaten with “many stripes” with rods (Acts 16:22). Together with Silas and other apostles, Paul was subject to much more abuse, which left their marks on him.

And Paul reminds his Galatian converts of the scars on his body and speaks of them proudly as the “marks” of the Lord Jesus. Just as the soldier’s wounds are glorious and honorable wounds because they tell of his courage and his devotion to his country’s cause, so Paul points to the honorable scars he bore as proof of his fidelity to Christ.

But while it is true that the primary reference of our text is to the scars of the old and recent wounds, which Paul had endured in the service of Christ, Paul refers to something deeper. After all, the true marks of Jesus are not outward but inward, not physical but spiritual. Paul further told the Galatians, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” For Paul, the scar on his body is a sign of his own crucifixion or suffering with Christ and now they are no more physical, but spiritual, they are no longer external, but internal. The final and absolutely decisive proof that Paul belonged to Christ was that he had the Spirit of Christ and that Christ lived over again in him. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. The scars on his body now are an indication of Christ who lived in him.

**Do you have marks of Jesus on your body- marks that tell a story about how you have suffered for Jesus or for the faith? Does the spirit of Jesus live in you? Exhibited in marks of inclusion, hospitality, obedience to the father’s will, mercy and much more?**

**Or do you carry scars of pain, shame or disgrace in your bodies? If so bring them to the Lord today so that he can turn them into marks of his forgiveness, healing and transformation.**

**Fulton J Sheen once said, “ Show me your hands. Do they have scars from giving? Show me your feet. Are they wounded in service? Show me your heart. Have you left a place for divine love?”**