

**ST BLAISE – EVENSONG 2010**  
**SERMON-CHRIST CHURCH PARISH**  
**BISHOP WILLIAM MCCLEAN**  
St. Matthew 16:24



***“THEN SAID JESUS UNTO HIS DISCIPLES, IF ANY MAN WILL COME AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF, AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS, AND FOLLOW ME.”***

What a wonderful day upon which to administer the sacrament of Confirmation; the Feast of Saint Blasius or as some say – Saint Blaise.

The text is taken from the Gospel for the Common of a Martyr Bishop; the Gospel appointed in the Missal for the Feast of Saint Blaise. Here was a man who knew - deeply – the power of the cross. As a physician – he served not only the people of God – but the Great Physician Himself. We are really not that much different – are we? I say that because – you see – no one can really KNOW Jesus Christ by faith – without feeling the power of the Cross. Do we not find in our Prayer Book and do we not pray: “O Saviour of the world, who by thy Cross and Precious Blood hast redeemed us; save us and help us we humbly beseech thee, O Lord?” As Blasius carried the Cross of Christ before him; so our Lord carries His Cross with Him among us. How do we explain Christ’s presence in history? Well – to quote a popular TV show: “I’ll take religion for \$200, please.” I believe the holy Cross does that for us. It is a historical fact which took place on a particular day in a particular year; AND - can be proven through history. As powerful as our Lord’s teaching was – as mighty as His personality was – the fact remains that it is Jesus Christ and Him crucified and risen again - Who has plowed His way down through two millennia of history. Saint Paul wrote in his First Epistle to the Corinthians: “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” (I Cor. 2:2)

As reckless - and torn - and sinful - and careless as this present world of ours is – it would NOT have one iota of spiritual life WITHOUT the Cross on Calvary. That hillside outside the city of Jerusalem is not only the epicenter for Christians – it is the very epicenter for the spiritual life of the world. “O Saviour of the world, who by thy Cross and Precious Blood hast redeemed us; save us and help us...” This - my dear friends – is our constant prayer

You know – it really wasn’t like this in the beginning at all. Remember our Lord’s Apostles? His own disciples wanted no thought or talk of any kind concerning the suffering or death of their Lord and Master; none at all. They refused to speak of it. In fact it was Saint Peter who said: “Be it far from Thee, Lord.” What do you think caused them to have this attitude? It was because they wanted a Messiah Who would be above all of this. They wanted A Messiah who would be far superior to such foolish and unacceptable thoughts. They played DOWN this whole idea of the Cross and Crucifixion. Afterwards they learned to say – just as St. Paul wrote – as I mentioned a moment ago: “We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness.”

Has there been much change since the first century? I would say yes – quite a lot. But – you know – there are those out there in the world who “profess and call themselves Christians” - who would very much like to have Jesus Christ WITHOUT the Cross. They want to clean Him all up. They want to wash the blood and the tears away. They want to cover all of His wounds and dress Him up in beautiful clothes. But in the words of the Great Karnack: “No can do.” Now I do have to say in all honesty that these people do love Jesus Christ. They truly do! They love Him and they worship Him – but none-the-less – they stop short of the Cross. Many there be who believe that their redemption is in the law - and not in the Cross.

I remember one time talking with someone who really had no objection to a crucifix. Isn’t THAT a novel and unusual idea? What they objected to was the blood dripping from the crown of thorns, the spear hole - and the blood dripping from our Lord’s wounds. As I just mentioned - clean it all up – and I’ll accept it! As I thought about this it made little or no sense to me. If we clean it all up – then we have missed the reality and the very truth of it all, haven’t we?

There is a famous sculpture called “Ecce homo.” I’m sure many of you have seen it. It depicts the head of Christ with the crown of thorns. Blood is running down His forehead and cheeks - and He has a very sad countenance upon His face. It takes its title from the words of Pontius Pilate recorded for us in St. John’s Gospel: “Behold the man.” (St. John 19:5) At first sight – it looks oh so terribly gory. But when you stop and think about it - in the light of our Gospel reading

WAS REAL! The Cross IS real! Calvary WAS real! The Crucifixion WAS real! No matter what we do to – as they say to - “clean them up” the fact of their reality remains. So along with Saint Paul - we preach Christ and Him crucified.

Our Confirmand promised this evening – just as we did at our own Confirmation to “follow Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour.” I’m going to tell you that none of you can do that without denying yourself and taking up the Cross that Jesus Christ has given each of us to bear. The Prayer Book tells us that our bounden duty is to “worship God every Sunday in his Church and to work, pray and give for the spread of his kingdom. That’s a tall order, isn’t it? But if we remind ourselves – over and over again – that we are following Christ and we stand – as did St. Blasius - in the shadow of His Cross – then ours will be that much easier to bear.

The Cross of Jesus Christ is for ALL of us. There isn’t any great work anywhere that is done or accomplished without a cross of some kind or another. As each of us does good for our church – and for our country; and as we serve them and protect them – then each of us must have our own cross. Let’s think about it another way. The law of the Cross prevails everywhere. The bonds of sin are released from us through Someone else’s pain and suffering. There isn’t anyone in this church who doesn’t know WHO that Someone is. Yes – even our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ had a Cross-.

So now we begin to draw some conclusions, don’t we? Now we begin to see some additional glimpses of light. If our Lord Jesus Christ bore the Cross-for us – should we not then be like Simeon and bear our Cross-for Christ? There are all kinds of loving, willing Christians in the world. That’s a great thing! But you know that while many are willing to be Christians – they aren’t willing to bear the Cross. It isn’t easy being a Christian. If you think it is – then you aren’t working hard enough at it.

What you have if you stop short of the Cross – is nothing more than some kind of outward conformity – some kind of veneer. We know what veneer is and does. Soak it in water and you’ll readily see. We don’t want to be involved Christians – we want to be Committed Christians. You know the difference, don’t you? The chickens that provided the eggs for your breakfast were

sausage and bacon were MOST DEFINITELY COMMITTED.

Veneer doesn’t go deep enough. We need the real wood – the wood of the Cross. Veneer can be separated from the inexpensive wood beneath it – but the committed Christian should not attempt to separate Christ from the Cross.

Until we come to know and accept Jesus Christ as a suffering Saviour – the suffering Servant of Yahweh as the Prophet Isaiah refers to the Messiah – then we don’t really know Jesus at all.

“O Saviour of the world, who by thy Cross and Passion...” Think about it! “Saviour of the world...” Jesus Christ wants to SAVE the world. His Cross was the Cross of Salvation that makes all of this possible. As committed Christians our crosses are the crosses of service.

“Do you promise to follow Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour? So as each of us answered at our own Confirmations: “I do” - then let’s go back out into the world and preach Christ – never separating Him from His Cross – but always remembering to stand in its shadow.

