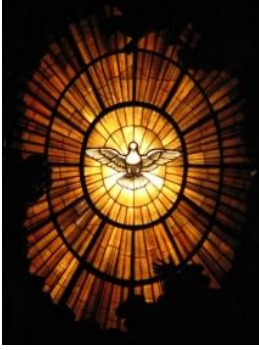


## FAITH, JUSTICE AND THE THIEF ON THE CROSS



The story of the criminal on the cross is one of my favorite readings. There is a calming, yet powerful feeling when hearing the thief ask Jesus to remember him and Jesus replying "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

We hear the echoes of this exchange in the Sign of Peace; the priest prays to Jesus to "Look not upon our sins, but on the faith of your Church." The priest concludes the prayer by asking that Jesus "grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom where you live for ever and ever." Ask around, most of us would desire peace and unity in the kingdom of Jesus. We especially desire that others would seek peace and unity with us. Much more difficult to ask that we change and by changing we achieve peace within us and with others.

The mission of Christ is to "bring good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, new sight to the blind, and to set the downtrodden free." (Luke 4:18). How often do we seek unity with the poor, the captives, the blind, and the free? "Look not upon our sins but on the faith of your Church." We do not know if the good thief was saved by faith alone but we know that Paul later wrote "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?" and "So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead." James 2: 14-17.

St. John Paul II once said "[W]e must recognize Christ in the poorest and the most marginalized, those whom the Eucharist... commits us to serve." (As the Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us, "The Eucharist commits us to the poor.") He wished to remind Catholics that involvement in what are sometimes called "peace and justice" issues is not optional. To be Catholic and live out our faith requires attention to scripture, participation in the sacraments, and engagement in social action. A faith without works – without concrete engagement with the least of our brethren -- is dead.

The Eucharist reminds us of our commitment as Catholics to work for peace and justice. There is a powerful, yet calming, feeling when we work for peace and justice, and constantly asking Jesus to remember us.

(Readings for the 34<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time)



ARCHDIOCESE  
OF PORTLAND  
IN OREGON

Office of Life, Justice, & Peace