

SEPTEMBER *God's Leaders are Forgiven*

Read 2 Samuel 12:1–13, Romans 7:14–25, and John 3:14–16. What similarities do you see?

The Peanuts™ cartoon shows Lucy lecturing Linus. She explains to him that inside of him he has a saint leading him to do good and a sinner pushing him toward evil. Linus gets a queasy look on his face, holds his stomach and says: "I think I can feel them fighting in there."

Certainly Paul felt the struggle. He laments his inability to do the good that he wants to do and his constant choosing of the evil that he wants to avoid. "Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24) he exclaims.

We may be able to avoid the struggle between doing good or evil for a time, but something or someone (like Nathan confronting David) always brings us back to the realization that we are losing the battle against the evil in and around us.

My almost four-year-old granddaughter brought me a crucifix that was waiting to be mounted on a wall of her new house. "Look, Grandpa," she said, cradling the cross in her hands, "they forgot the nails." And indeed, the stylized figure on the cross gave evidence of no nails. It was a beautiful piece of flowing bronze art but the nails were missing.

Holy Cross Day (September 14) helps us put the nails back into the story. It is easy, in our concern for making the gospel more acceptable, to leave the nails out. After all, people would rather hear about God's love than a lot of

suffering and dying. In the midst of a life that may have more nails than smiles, a God story that bristles with nails may seem decidedly unhelpful. But the quick trip to the open tomb without going by way of the cross (complete with nails) can create a beautiful artistic impression, but have little to do with the resurrection.

Confronting the cross of Christ drags us kicking and screaming to the scandal of Calvary and the cosmic depression of that Friday death. Then Easter can overwhelm us with the truth that evil has been defeated, we have been forgiven, and death has indeed lost its sting and the grave its victory.

Jesus said and continues to say, "You did not choose me but I chose you. . . ." (John 15:16) As God's chosen ones we join in Paul's thanksgiving, reveling in the grace of God who loved enough to save us.



For reflection and discussion

What does the "scandal" of the cross mean to you? In what way is God's forgiveness a daily gift to you? How do you share it?

Prayer

Lord, help us not only to confront the sin that still plagues us, but also to return often to the cross of Christ where we are assured of the forgiveness that we have received and that we have to share. In the name of the one who has made the cross holy. Amen.