

Crime Scene Investigators ... or CSI ... as it's known, is a very popular television show. It's just been renewed for its 14th season; and has not only won several awards but spun-off two other TV shows. It follows a group of Crime Scene Investigators from the Las Vegas Police Department ... where they use advanced technology, ingenuity, and luck to gather critical evidence, analyze the evidence, and eventually (within an hour-long episode) solve serious crimes.

CSI has become so popular, that in certain British constabularies what were formerly called Scene of Crime Officers ... or SOCO ... have been renamed CSI. Lawyers and judges have observed what is being called the "CSI effect" - where crime victims and criminal juries now expect to see all kinds of evidence ... and have come to expect high technology in the presentation of evidence in court.

Today we hear first from the prophet Zechariah who lived sometime late in the 5th century before the time of Christ. He gives an image that elicits thoughts of the Crucifixion of Jesus ... comparing this event to a tragic national defeat in battle.

Based on the first part of this vision, the evidence would seem to point to a tragedy - something to be avoided. Yet the prophet goes on to speak of a "fountain to purify from sin and uncleanness."

This "fountain" is an icon of Holy Baptism - the Sacrament that opens the gates of Supernatural Grace for us ... the Sacrament that opens the way to the other Sacraments - all of which are sources - fountains, if you will - of sanctifying grace ... connecting us to God's life and God's love; His mercy and His power.

St. Paul reminds us in the second reading, that Baptism clothes us in Christ - as well as uniting us as one in Christ ... and making us heirs to the promises of God's covenants with humanity ... all of which are fulfilled in the Person of Jesus Christ.

There are times, I would guess, when we might take our Faith for granted. Times when we begin to live our lives as if we really didn't believe in God or in Christ. At those times, it may even be difficult for an outside observer to tell whether we are followers of Jesus at all - at those times when we live our lives without Christ ... when we forget the

Divine relationship we share through our own Baptism. When we find ourselves in such a state, there may be scant evidence that we are disciples of Jesus Christ ... maybe very little evidence that we are Christians.

And in the Gospel, we hear St. Peter's profession of faith - in which he recognizes Jesus as the Anointed One - the Messiah - the Christ of God. And then Jesus begins to explain ... just what sort of Messiah He will be ... and for the first time reveals the mystery of the Cross to His disciples.

Today's Gospel ends with Jesus telling them ... and us as well ... that "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself ... and take up his cross daily and follow me."

This at first may sound intimidating - after all, who wants to suffer? Yet Jesus knew that the Cross was coming ... and he did not shy away from it. Rather, he embraced it with love and compassion. Not a love for pain or a love of suffering ... but a love for us ... a love for humanity ... a Divine Love ... a love that desired to save us from ourselves and from our sins ... a love that desired to draw us into deeper communion with the Most Holy Trinity.

We too must, in the words of Jesus, "take up [our] cross[es] daily ... and follow [Him.]" And in order to do this with love, we must receive first the Graces of Faith, Hope, and Love - which we received in Baptism ... and strengthened through our worthy reception of the Eucharist ... so that we might follow Christ in all things ... and daily take up our cross ... with an abiding and Supernatural Love ... all of which comes to us from God.

Only then will we leave behind evidence of who we are ... of who we are called to be through or Baptism - the adopted brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ ... daughters and sons of God the Father, Redeemed in Christ and filled with the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.