

- Across from Penn Station and Madison Square Garden on 31st Street in midtown Manhattan sits St. John the Baptist Catholic Church. In addition to being a very pretty church, St. John's is also the location of the St. Padre Pio Shrine.
- If you are unfamiliar with Padre Pio, he was a Capuchin Franciscan friar who was born in the obscure town of Pietrelcina, Italy, in 1887. But by the time of his death in 1968, Padre Pio was very well known amongst Catholics around the world.
- This is mostly because of the supernatural phenomena and gifts that accompanied his priesthood. For example, he could read souls and often knew the sins of his penitents in the confessional even before they confessed them.
- He had the gift of bi-location, which means he could be present in two places at the same time. And sometimes while offering Mass he would levitate. But the one supernatural phenomenon for which Padre Pio was most famous was the stigmata.
- Stigmata are bodily wounds that correspond to the crucifixion wounds of Jesus, and at the age of 31, Padre Pio received the stigmata in his hands, feet, and side while kneeling in front of a large crucifix.
- He bore these wounds for the 50 years, until he died at the age of 81. Although he lost about a cup of blood of day, he never grew anemic or lost weight. And many people close to the saint said his wounds had a sweet odor, like that of roses.
- When Padre Pio offered Mass, people could see light shining through the wounds in his hands, but when he wasn't offering Mass, Padre Pio would wear fingerless gloves to cover the wounds.
- In the Padre Pio Shrine in New York City you can see one of these gloves as well as one of his blood-stained socks and a few other relics.
- In our second reading today we are told that as Christians we are called to "proclaim Christ crucified." And certainly bearing the physical wounds of Christ, as did Padre Pio and a handful of other saints, is one very dramatic way to do this.
- Stigmatists, like Padre Pio, St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Catherine of Siena, proclaimed Christ crucified physically. God used their very bodies as testaments to the grace and power of Christ's suffering and death.
- But while most of us will never receive the stigmata, we are all still called to proclaim Christ crucified. We proclaim Christ crucified not so much with our words, but with the way we live our lives. Specifically, we do this by dying to ourselves so that Christ can live in us.
- As Christians we do not live according to the ways of this world, but we live with our eyes set on Christ and on the world to come.
- In saying that we proclaim Christ *crucified*, we recognize the value of His Passion and death, and we, in turn, embrace suffering and self-denial as a means of uniting ourselves with His Passion and death.
- We look for ways to die to self, so that Christ may live within us. The holy season of Lent reminds us that we should turn to fasting, penance and almsgiving as ways to die to ourselves. But these aren't the only ways to proclaim Christ crucified.
- Simply practicing acts of charity, forgiving those who have harmed us in any way, and offering up our sufferings – no matter how big or small – are also great ways of proclaiming Christ crucified with our lives.

- Many of the saints have also recommended giving thanks to God for our sufferings simply because they can be so spiritually beneficial.
- This may seem like foolishness to the world, but for those of us who are called to follow Christ, we know with St. Paul that the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom.
- One other very important way we can die to self so that our very lives proclaim Christ crucified is through obedience to God and His laws, which is a form of martyrdom to self. It is this way of proclaiming Christ crucified that our readings address today.
- In looking at today's Gospel we see Jesus getting angry with the money changers because of their complete lack of respect for God.
- Jesus was upset because the money changers were using the Temple as a place of commerce and not a place of worship. They were using religion for personal gain. They had no respect for God's law – they just sought to benefit from it.
- The Jews visited the Temple at various times of the year in order to make ritual sacrifices to God in accordance with the Mosaic Law. This required animals for sacrificing as well as people who would exchange foreign currency for the local currency.
- Unfortunately, the people who conducted this business provided these services at a great cost, often manipulating the Mosaic Law in order to cheat and extort money from the pious Jews who were simply trying to fulfill the dictates of the Law.
- The people that Jesus drove out of the Temple were guilty of using God's laws to accommodate themselves. Rather than dying to self through obedience to God's law, they were making religion and the laws of the God conform to their own desires.
- Our first reading, which lists the Ten Commandments, reminds us as well of the importance of God's law. In listening to it we must ask ourselves: how do I treat the Law of God?
- Do I reverence it, and am I obedient to it? Or do I ignore parts of it or pervert it because I find it too difficult to follow – or perhaps too inconvenient?
- Certainly God's laws have taken a beating in the popular culture of the past few decades. In a society such as ours that says a person should be able to determine what's right or true for one's self, the Law of God is often perceived as an obstacle to freedom and autonomy.
- And yet, my friends, we must remember that God's law exists not for our profit or our personal comfort, but for our salvation. It's not merely a truth amongst an infinite variety of truths we can choose from. It is the only truth.
- And quite honestly, if we are to hope for salvation with any integrity, we need to be sure that we are doing our best to follow it. This is often painful because it requires dying to one's own desires.
- Yet, my friends, if we can follow the law of God and avoid sin, we will grow in holiness. Living according to God's laws preserves us from sin and makes us stronger in overcoming temptation.
- So rather than being a negative thing, God's law protects us and keeps us on the path toward true sanctity.
- My friends, as Christians made in the image and likeness of God and baptized into our Lord's death and resurrection, let us boldly proclaim Christ crucified – not simply with our words, but through our acts of charity, forgiveness, penance and self-denial.
- Most importantly, let us proclaim Christ crucified through our obedience to God's laws. And as always, in being faithful to God, let us trust that He will take us to Himself on Judgment Day.