



Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers
From the clergy and members
of Holy Trinity Church
Forbes Park, Makati

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Title: **"New Shoes"**
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Readings for this Sunday:

First Reading Zechariah 12:8-10; 13:1
Second Reading Galatians 3:23-29
Gospel Luke 9:18-24

There is supposed to be an old American Indian saying that states: if you want to understand a man, walk a mile in his moccasins. Whether or not any Indian ever said those words, it nevertheless contains wisdom. It is important to try to understand how others perceive things in order to appreciate their uniqueness and perhaps even the problems and challenges that they face. This makes meaningful dialogue possible, instills greater compassion, and makes the experience of life richer.

The image we deal with in today's Scripture readings is both similar and different. Paul writes in his letter to the Galatians: "As many of you who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Here, too, we have the image of an item of clothing that is put on.

This image has been a powerful one for the Church throughout its history. Indeed, it is the refrain for a hymn verse sung in the Eastern Christian tradition not only when there is a baptism, but on the Sundays and feast days when baptism used to be administered.

The image is rich, and lends itself to many uses. Putting on new clothes can be seen as entering a new state of mind- I know that I feel different in a new shirt or some new shoes. Of course, it can also imply putting on a costume to play a role, (although that might be considered being in disguise, too.) In another sense, it can draw on that old "Indian" saying about the shoes- the act of assuming someone else's perspective in order for us to improve our own.

That is one of the several reasons that I request that we sometimes use Tagalog in our worship. Not only is it the national language of the country we live in, but it also reminds us that on any given Sunday, someone is at a disadvantage because of using a language and an idiom that is foreign and strange. It is one of the greatest lessons I have ever learned has been to live as a national and racial minority in a foreign country, and it is something not to resent or ignore, but to recognize and use. We are walking in Filipino moccasins!

If we "put on Christ" like an item of clothing, we might also say that we are "walking in his shoes" to try to imagine how He sees things. That may be a new idea for some. We tend to think about obeying Jesus, loving Jesus, but not necessarily trying to understand Him. Biblical studies often don't help that- nowadays they often seem dedicated to explaining away Jesus' identity as something unique and special: the "historical Jesus" becomes something to be investigated, dissected, categorized...but not really loved or followed. But assuming "the mind of Christ" in ourselves is really what the Christian religion encourages us to do. If we hold Jesus at a distance, worship Him, fawn over Him, put Him on a holy pedestal, then we have avoided trying to be like Him. Although I don't like gimmicks, especially those that can trivialize important things, the religious fad of the 90's that asked "What Would Jesus Do?" had a point. It is, in fact, a question that we have to ask if we are to actually do something with our faith.

The image of putting on Christ also implies intimacy and love. For whatever its merits or controversy, the recent film "Brokeback Mountain" contained a use of clothing that was very moving. In a final scene, one of the characters discovers one of his old shirts hanging in a closet on a hanger inside another shirt owned by a

deceased friend. The two articles of clothing are almost like a shared skin in which the two persons' relationship is symbolized. I will risk suggesting that such an intimate, if non-sexual intimacy is also part of "putting on Christ". In fact, if it isn't this intimate, then it isn't the all-consuming unity of body, mind and spirit that St Paul is talking about when he says "put on Christ."

There is one final point about Paul's image of "putting on Christ". When he uses it in today's reading from Galatians, he doesn't make it something that is a personal belonging of the individual Christian. In fact, he goes on to state some things that are still considered very controversial: "There are now no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus." So becoming one with Christ, and assuming the mind of Christ doesn't make you a saint in solitude, but rather part of the Body of Christ which is the Christian Church. It means that you look at people the way Jesus did, handle disagreements the way Jesus did, and assume priorities in your life the way Jesus did. Does that sound presumptuous? It is! But it is also the reason that God came into human life in our Lord Jesus Christ- to make us all- man and woman, Chinese, Filipino and expat to be part of Himself- a new people, a holy priesthood and citizens of a new Kingdom. That is worth wearing Jesus moccasins for a while, and looking at the world in a whole, new way.