

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Sep 13th 2013

Today, in case you hadn't noticed, is Friday the 13th, in the year 2013 no less. For those of you who suffer from friggatriskaidekaphobia (fear of Friday the 13th), you're not out of the woods yet, we have another one coming in December. In researching it, I found that a surprising number of people have a real fear of Friday the 13th, reportedly about 20 million in the United States alone. Actually, as it turns out, Friday the 13th days turn out to be generally safer than other days, probably because people are more careful.

The superstition is apparently of fairly recent origin; mentions of it appearing only around 1900 or so. It's also not universal. In some cultures Tuesday the 13th is considered unlucky. In some other cultures, the number 17 is considered unlucky.

Fear of 13 seems to have a particularly powerful hold in the U.S., however. Those of us who live in the United States have probably noticed that in most tall buildings the elevator skips from 12 to 14, as if there were no 13th floor.

It's silly, really, particularly if you learned the same account of the origin of the superstition that I did, which is that Jesus was crucified on a Friday and that there were 13 in attendance at the Last Supper. It seems to me to be among most bizarre of misunderstandings of Christianity to associate this with bad luck. We call it "Good Friday" not "Bad Friday."

True enough, Jesus underwent the ultimate test and sacrifice for us on a Friday, but he did it to redeem us — not so that we'd be looking out for black cats, avoiding walking under ladders and trying to keep from breaking mirrors. Paul has it exactly right in the first reading. He once was a blasphemer, persecutor and arrogant, only to have his life turned around by his devotion to Christ.

So here's to the luckiest day of the year. The one that saved our souls.

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