

**XI TRINITY 2015**  
**SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH**  
**FATHER CRAIG LOONEY**  
**I COR. 15.1 St. LUKE 18.9**



When it comes to our Faith...do we consider ourselves **professionals** or **amateurs**? The difference has to do with our attitude toward God, toward ourselves and toward others. It's all about our attitude.

In his sermon to the graduating class of 1916 of Columbia University in New York City, Father Hudson Stuck, Archdeacon of the Yukon, looked out at the faces of men about to begin lives of service to others: doctors, lawyers, teachers, priests, scientists and social workers.

Father Stuck asked the graduating class what they expected to do with their lives. Would they continue to serve others faithfully? Or would they use their chosen vocations to acquire wealth and fame? Their answers would determine whether they were **professionals** or **amateurs**.

In the Parable of the Lawyer and the Tax Collector...Father Stuck sees a lesson to be learned about love and compassion toward others...the foundations of what it means to be of service to others. Jesus tells us he came to serve others...we too should be about the business of serving others.

The lawyer in today's Gospel is the **professional** who thinks he knows everything there is to know about his religion. He goes to church to pray and stands directly in front of the altar. He thanks God he is not like the low life guy in the back pew who works for the Franchise Tax Board. The lawyer wants to be seen...his religion is all about being noticed.

The tax guy is the **amateur** in the story. He admits to God and to himself he knows very little about his religion. All he can do is bow his head before God and ask for his mercy. Jesus tells us the tax guy in the story went home justified...in a correct relationship with God. The tax guy comes to church because he knows he is a sinner and can only rely on God's mercy and compassion for forgiveness. His is a religion of the heart.

The **professional** lawyer has forgotten a key part of the Great Commandment...to love

others. He comes to church to congratulate himself and remind God he is an upstanding member of the community. He dismisses the **amateur** tax guy as morally and socially inferior.

Father Stuck, like Saint Paul, had no tolerance for people who used their wealth, fame or position in life to impress others. He held a particular disdain for people within the Church who set themselves apart from others because they were rich, better educated or lived in the right Zip Code.

Where are we in the story of the lawyer and the tax collector? Are we comfortable enough in our Faith to say we would never act like the lawyer in the story? Do we set up barriers around ourselves that exclude people we think are less worthy of God's attention than we are? Are we **professional** or **amateur** Christians? It's all about our attitude.

We miss the point of the Gospel if we fail to understand God wants us to admit we are **amateurs** and not **professionals** when it comes to our Faith. Father Stuck would be the first to agree being an **amateur** Christian is not a bad thing...it means we take our responsibility to serve others seriously...to show love and compassion toward others.

Saint Paul would also agree and would not take offense at being called an **amateur**. He reminds us we are **amateurs** too and the Good News he received and passes on to us is what makes our Faith strong. He has to brag just a little and tell us how much harder that any of the other apostles he has worked...maybe a little of the **professional** Paul comes through...although it doesn't last.

We are now almost 100 years removed from the graduating class of 1916 of Columbia University in New York City. Father Stuck returned to the Yukon and served both Native Alaskans and American settlers as a priest until his death from pneumonia in 1920. He is buried in Fort Yukon.

It seems we can learn much from Father Hudson Stuck and Saint Paul and others who have much to say about being an **amateur** Christian. It's all about our attitude. Let's make sure ours are in the right place.

